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Life of Mademoiselle Le Gras (Louise de Marillac)

1. Name,

2. Sisters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul.

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Life

LIFE OF
MADemoISELLE LE GRAS

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MADemoiselle ^{b.c.} LE GRAS

(LOUISE DE MARILLAC)

FOUNDRESS OF THE SISTERS OF CHARITY

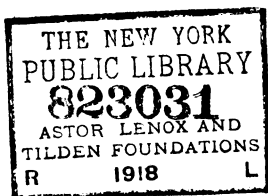


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Archbishop of New York.

New York, March 20, 1917

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TO THE DAUGHTERS OF CHARITY.

This book is not worthy of the name it bears; but love for your Mother has inspired it. Receive it with kindness, recognize in it her whose life you reproduce every day, and grant the Author a remembrance before God.

*Library Journal - Jan 30 - 18

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LETTER OF
MGR. MERMILLOD,

Bishop of Hebron and Vicar-Apostolic of Geneva,

TO THE AUTHOR.

MONTHOUX (HAUTE-SAVOIE), December 8, 1882.

M——

You are publishing the life of Mlle. Le Gras, and memories which connect this holy life with St. Francis de Sales give me a right to thank and congratulate you.

You have produced a useful and most attractive book. You have seized a very providential opportunity of placing in relief the humble, great Christian soul whom the glory of St. Vincent de Paul had almost eclipsed, but who was nevertheless a docile and faithful co-operator in his works.

Her vocation was pointed out to her by St. Vincent while she was still a lady of the world; but she was even then exposing her life in the service of the plague-stricken. "Fear not," he said "God our Saviour wishes you to serve Him in something tending to His glory, and be sure that He will preserve you for that work." She was faithful to the designs of God; and the account which you have given us is not only an admirable biography of a Saint, but it is a complete history of the religious move-

ment of that epoch, which serves as a frame for this living portrait. You have painted her soul, her work, and her times. You have shrunk from no labor of research. Library archives, manuscripts, and the letters of St. Vincent have been compelled to serve your patient investigation. In the admirable pages of your book are found no tricks of artificial rhetoric, but minute details of most interesting facts, sweet, pious perceptions of mystic science, united with analogies between the society of that seventeenth century and the wants, aspirations, and evils of our own time.

The clergy will certainly be interested in reading a story which teaches the kind of zeal and evangelical industry necessary for raising souls and grouping them together in works of devotedness.

The Daughters of Charity, so well named the Family of Providence, will love to reanimate themselves with the vivifying memory of her who was their foundress and their Mother. It would not be surprising if more than one young girl might owe the lights and courage of her vocation to the meeting with your book. Above all is it desirable that the sweet, solid life of Mlle. Le Gras were better known among our Christian women. Alas, how often I repeat that with many of them, there is a deplorable compromise between the maxims of the Gospel and the attractions of society!

How many ladies engage by turns in easy devotions and elegant frivolities! Ever on the alert for pious excitement, they make a contract with God for practices of devotion; they organize good works, and give to vanity the greater part of the benefit. What a contrast to the

portrait painted in your pages! Amid the violent agitations of *La Fronde*, Mlle. Le Gras and her Daughters held their ground, animated with that intelligent faith and fervent piety which made St. Vincent write: "May God strengthen you in such a way that it may be said of you, *Mulierem fortem quis inveniet!* You understand this Latin; therefore I shall not explain."

You have given us a substantial work, pithy and charming. It will teach more than one heart, now troubled by our darkening horizon or overwhelmed by our storms, how it is that Christians are never discouraged and ever devoted.

The consoling view of the origin of the Daughters of Charity; the life of an elect soul; the story of painful days when such heroes as St. Francis de Sales, St. Vincent de Paul, M. Olier, Cardinal de Berulle, lived and acted, surrounded by an assemblage of Christians not less heroic—is it not a most edifying spectacle? How it forces us to become Saints, to be docile to the designs of God, to love our Saviour Jesus, to devote ourselves to our fellow-men, by amassing for their service a treasure of gay patience and joyous tenderness!

Be kind enough to accept my respects, good wishes, and blessing.

GASPARD,

Bishop of Hebron, Vicar-Apostolic of Geneva.

LETTER OF
THE SUPERIOR-GENERAL
of the Priests of the Mission and of the Daughters of Charity
TO THE AUTHOR.

PARIS, December 8, 1882.

M.——

You desire from me some words of recommendation, in offering to the public your important and conscientious labor on Louise de Marillac, who, with St. Vincent de Paul, founded the Daughters of Charity and was their first Superioress.

Your work recommends itself and, I doubt not, will be favorably received. I have been struck with the erudition you give proof of in this work, and the happy tact with which you bring forward the testimony of St. Vincent de Paul in favor of this Mother of the poor; this strong woman, this elect soul, ever pure—pure in her youth, in her marriage, in her widowhood; and who wept so many tears over her slightest faults that she could scarcely be appeased. I have experienced a true joy in reading your account of the admirable Conferences of St. Vincent de Paul with the Daughters of Charity. Your appreciation of them is a just one; they vividly recall the Conferences held by the Fathers of the Desert. Existing circumstances give to the publication of the life of Louise de Marillac an interest and importance which are easily felt. It is evident that the work of *laicisation* which is now being carried on, calls more than ever for

simple faithful souls, especially Christian ladies, who practise the works of charity while living in the midst of the world.

Hence, what is better calculated, after the grace of God, to excite zeal for every good work than the example of Mlle. Le Gras, who merited to be chosen by God to assist St. Vincent de Paul in the establishment of the Daughters of Charity, and in the realization of many of his great and holy enterprises? In giving us this work written in your characteristic style you have aided materially the cause of religion and society, and you have reason to hope that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.

I have the honor to remain, in the love of the Lord
Jesus and His Immaculate Mother,

Your very humble and devoted servant,

A. FIAT,

*Superior of the Priests of the Mission and
of the Daughters of Charity.*

PREFACE.

THE seventeenth century, arrogant and robust, was a period of revival and reparation, especially during its first fifty years, and the religious peace re-established by Henry IV. favored the opening of a great era for France. Under the protection of a wise, firm authority, the evils of war were repaired, and the reform decreed by the Council of Trent affected all ranks of the Church. The clergy were purified and encouraged; seminaries begun; retreats, preparatory to Holy Orders, and ecclesiastical conferences, established; and whilst the older communities returned to their first rule and fervor, new religious families sprung into existence. Souls attracted to penance took refuge with the Capuchins, while those called to interior life saw the portals of the Visitation or the grating of the French Carmelites open before them. "Souls!" exclaims a distinguished historian of this great religious movement—"Souls! at this epoch we see them, we touch them." God plants Saints as He did stars, and the night is illumined. The Church of France had never before shone so brightly. St.

Francis de Sales, who belonged to us in feeling and language before his mountains belonged to France; St. Jane de Chantal, Cæsar du Bus, Claude Bernard, Father Honoré Champigny, M. de Renty, M. Bourdoise, Cardinal de Berulle, with his two admirable daughters, Mme. Acarie and Mother Madeleine de Saint Joseph, finally M. Olier, not to mention others, appeared at this time, and, in Paris, met the most popular of Saints and Apostles, him whose venerated name personifies, as it were, the religious and charitable movement of this period—Vincent de Paul.

Mingling in this illustrious company we find a woman, humble, modest, always wishing to hide herself, so much that even now after death she seems desirous of being wrapped in obscurity. Yes, brilliant as was the time in which she lived, in spite of the innumerable efforts to revive its splendor, all that is generally known of this woman, whose name in the world was Louise de Marillac, is that she founded "The Congregation of Daughters of Charity," which is itself, as has been said, "the most beautiful expression ever heard on earth, a sweet communication between God and man." *

But the circumstances connected with her foundation, the great virtues she practised in a life of seventy years, the active part she took in almost all the charities of St. Vincent de Paul, are sealed letters to a generation eager for biographies and curious for his-

* The Abbé Perreyve.

toric exhumations. To the present time the only work consecrated to Mlle. Le Gras dates 1674. Republished with additions in the eighteenth century, and finally reprinted in 1846, it is now forgotten, justly so from its brevity and antiquated style. The biographers of St. Vincent de Paul, it is true, could not pass over in silence his faithful co-operator; but those who have said most about her were not always the most exact. This leaves a blank to be regretted, almost an injustice. Alas! we may not hope to repair this omission fully; nevertheless numerous documents preserved from the destruction of St. Lazare in 1789, and mostly unpublished, permit us to retrace the grand outline of this venerated figure.

Some letters, most reliable sources of history, addressed to Mlle. Le Gras by Mgr. Camus, Bishop of Belley, her first director, and by the Keeper of Seals, Michel de Marillac, her uncle, and also a precious manuscript history of this statesman (himself too little known), serve as a part of our record of the early years of her life, and the family circle in which these years were passed. Among the correspondence of St. Vincent de Paul, recently published by the Priests of the Mission, are nearly four hundred letters of Mlle. Le Gras, which give an insight into her life as mother, widow, and foundress.

Numerous writings, also, of a private nature, such as prayers, meditations, and rules of conscience, throw light on her spiritual life; whilst biographical sketches of the first Sisters of Charity, written by their com-

panions, retrace the virtues of those who were associates in her works. Such are the sources of incontestable value to which we have had recourse.

Persuaded, with Bossuet, that "we can add nothing to the glory of extraordinary souls whose works praise them," we have sought only to place facts before the reader, and, without fatiguing him with opinions and reflections, leave him to draw conclusions, which, being his own, must be fruitful of good.

Our only aim is to be true and simple like her the features of whose life we have attempted to retrace. The life of Mlle. Le Gras is characterized by sweet sanctity. Nothing terrifying, nothing too austere, nothing beyond the reach of every one, or that any one with the grace of God may not imitate.

Nevertheless it takes forcible possession of the soul. Often, while studying this life, have we been reminded of the enthusiastic exclamation extorted from Libianus by the mother of St. John Chrysostom, "What women are among the Christians!"

Happy shall we be if we can make some soul partake of our admiration, or raise up some one or more to imitate Louise de Marillac.

LIFE OF M^{LL}E. LE GRAS.

CHAPTER I.

1591—1613.

The Marillac Family—Birth of Louise—Her Education—The Monastery of Poissy—Her Father's House—She thinks of joining the Capuchins—Father Honoré de Champigny diverts her from this Project—Her Marriage.



AN IRRESISTIBLE attraction draws us to the cradle of men and things. It seems as if we wish to circumvent the law that governs their growth or rules their vocation. This sentiment increases, moreover, in relation to predestined souls; we love to scrutinize the traces of a divine plan in the circumstances attending, or even in the generation preceding, their birth. In this the Holy Scripture itself serves as our model, carefully acquainting us with the relationship of men famous in early times, and giving us on two occasions the genealogy of our Saviour. Hence we may be permitted to recall briefly, at the beginning of these pages, the origin of her whose life we undertake to relate.

The Marillac, or Marlhac,* family, from which

* Lefèvre de Lezeau, in his " Histoire de la Vie de Messire Michel

she sprang on her father's side, came from upper Auvergne, where for a number of years they had been held in great veneration. The first of this family of whom we find trace in history was Bertrand, Lord of Marillac and Vastrie, who lived in the fourteenth century. He was descended from a Marillac whose tombstone (date unknown) was visible as late as the time of Louis XIV. in the Cathedral of St. Flour. Bertrand, being taken prisoner in England in 1382, was obliged to sell for his ransom the lordly mansion of his ancestors situated near Mauriac;* but his children and grandchildren continued to live in Auvergne, as is shown by the tombstones in the old churches of the country; for in those ages of faith everything tended toward the sanctuary, and the house of God was at the same time the safest depository of souvenirs. In the sixteenth century several members of the Marillac family, leaving their mountains, travelled abroad. From this time we find them in the monasteries and cloisters of Paris and the Isle of France; on the episcopal seats of Brittany, or in charge of important state affairs. One of them, Guillaume, the only one of direct interest to our narrative, was a soldier on the field of Moncontour. After the defeat of the Protestant arms he settled in Paris, and became Director of the

de Marillac," an unpublished work, from which we have borrowed the following details, says that for sake of euphony the name Marillac became Marillac by a change of orthography.

* Now the chief town of the canton, in the Department of Cantal.

Mint and Superintendent of Finance.* He had eight children, amongst whom we shall mention those only whose names find a place in our story: Michel, known as Chancellor de Marillac; Valence, wife of Baron d'Attichy, a Florentine nobleman, who came into France in the train of Marie de' Medicis; Louis, Marshal of France; and Louis, Lord of Ferrières, whose wife was Marguerite Le Camus, and who was the father of Mlle. Le Gras.† "If I notice nobility,"

* Guillaume de Marillac died in 1576, and was interred in Saint Paul's Church in Paris. He had eleven brothers, almost all distinguished, either in the army, in literature, or in the Church. Gilbert, the oldest, shared the fortunes, but not the revolt, of the Constable of Bourbon, and was, from the testimony of our historians, one of the best speakers of his time—a quality which, with liberality, was said to have been inherent in the Marillac family. His granddaughter, Marguerite d'Arbousse, Abbess and reformer of Val-de-Grace, died in the odor of sanctity and renowned for miracles. (See her Life, by Fleury, 1685.) Gabriel, the second brother, was he to whom De Thou paid this magnificent tribute: "For piety, integrity, and eloquence he has no equal." He was a man of the old school, and a severe critic of the manners of his time. Three others come in succession: Antoine, religious at Thiers; Charles, Archbishop of Vienne, Ambassador of the King to Soliman, to Henry VIII., and to Charles V., and who, in his zeal for clerical and judicial reform, brought about a reunion of the States-General of Orleans; lastly, Bertrand, who brought to the siege of Vannes the poor habit and the charity of St. Francis, with the sublime eloquence and theology of St. Bernard, and to whom, under God, Brittany owes the blessing of preservation from heresy.

† We attach much importance to historic accuracy in this place, to avoid the embarrassment of different genealogies in the Marillac family. One example will illustrate the reliance we can place on them. Father Anselm, considered a fair authority in such matters,

wrote St. Jerome after enumerating the ancestors of St. Paula, "it is not that I attach any importance to these temporal advantages; but I admire them from the moment that we rise above them and immolate them;" and he adds: "The glory of Paula in my eyes is, not to have had such things, but to have trodden them under foot for Jesus Christ." We can say as much for the humble foundress of the Daughters of Charity. To all her ancestral titles she preferred that of "Servant of the Poor," and this sacrifice is to-day her glory. God blessed it and made it fruitful; for, like the rod which legend tells us was covered with flowers and fruit in the Temple, Louise de Marillac was more productive than the rest of the entire tree from which she branched forth.

Born during one of the most troubled periods of our history, growing up amid the din of those religious and political conflicts which were one day to break the fortunes of her family, she passed the greater part of her life in the very centre of revolution. It was at that period of excitement which followed the assassination of Henry III. in Paris, and the entrance of Henry IV. into that city. Paris had just been submitted to a blockade of four months, in which nearly one seventh of its population perished. Sixteen citi- gives March 15, 1660, as the date of the death of Louise's father, aged sixty-eight years—which would make 1592 the date of his birth; but his daughter René de Marillac was born in 1588, leaving four years between the birth of father and daughter! Two things, however, are certain: 1st. The names of the father and mother of Louise (if we take the testimony of a writer of some importance, Gobillon, the

zens had divided the city into as many departments, in each of which one of their number exercised an absolute tyranny. At last the disorder was such that proscription-lists were freely circulated; on these were inscribed the names of persons accused of sympathy with the King of Navarre, each name followed by one of the letters *P. D. C.*,* indicating the nature of the death intended for him. The name of Louis de Marillac does not appear on the list; hence we conclude that he never mingled in the excesses of the time, but imitated the moderation of his brother Michel, who, in his efforts for peace and general reconciliation, would have been satisfied to lay down arms the moment the king would guarantee sufficient religious liberty.† Be this conjecture true or false, the

priest of St. Laurent, who, fifteen years after her death, and in the midst of those who had known her, wrote of her birthplace, and where she had grown up). 2d. Her relationship to the Keeper of Seals and Marshal de Marillac agrees with the documents we have before us; but whether her father were brother or cousin to the preceding is not in our power to determine with any certainty. We shall follow the first of these opinions, put forth by Moréri, which, if true, explains better the affectionate relationship of Mlle. Le Gras with the two most illustrious men of her race, admitting that it is not in accordance with the general certainty of our story. An opinion less probable has been advanced by some writers who believe Marguerite Le Camus, mother of Mlle. Le Gras, to have been a sister of Mgr. Camus, Bishop of Belley. We are unable to discover any basis for such a supposition except the similarity of name.

* *Pendu—Dagut—Chassé*: Hanged—Stabbed—Shot.

† Michel de Marillac, then counsellor to Parliament, acts an important part in the history of these times. He opposed the treaty destined to transfer the crown of France to a Spanish princess, and instigated

child of blessing and grace at whose biography we are anxious to arrive, was born in Paris itself, and in the midst of the surroundings we have described, Aug. 12, 1591.

The joy of her birth soon gave place to sadness. Mme. de Marillac died before her little daughter could recognize her. If the child ever saw the mother, it was when neither eyes nor heart are capable of memory. Ordinarily there is something wanting in a child not brought up on a mother's knee, like plants without sufficient sunlight; but in this case the privation seemed providential. Called to great things, the child was to receive a rugged education, and the melancholy impressions of her early years were destined to make her better understand the love necessary for the little motherless beings whom she would one day snatch from death.

M. de Marillac, finding himself solely responsible for the future of Louise, lavished on her the tenderest care, and her delicate health required all his attention. "God," she wrote, "taught me early that He wished me to find Him by the cross; from my birth, and at every stage of my life, I have never been with

the celebrated decree which promulgated anew the Salic law, one of the fundamental laws of the kingdom. It was he, also, who, after the entry of Henry IV. into Paris, called together a party of citizens and loaned 1200 crowns to the Count de Brissac to secure the service of the German infantry. When the law was enforced for the expulsion of the revolutionists, he obliged the King to erase his name from the list of the banished. (Lefèvre de Lézeau: "*Histoire de la Vie de Messire Michel de Marillac.*")

out occasions of suffering." The father was obliged to consent to a separation from his daughter. Desirous of having her taught the principles of Christian piety at an early age, he confided her to the care of her aunt, named also Louise de Marillac, a religious in the monastery of St. Louis at Poissy. What abode better calculated to elevate and form the mind than this magnificent abbey! It was founded by Philip the Fair, in memory of his ancestors, on the site of the castle inhabited by a line of queens from Clotilda, who joined in the victory of Tolbiac, to Blanche of Castile, who there gave birth to the saintly King Louis IX.

This magnificent structure covered a space sufficient for a small city. On all sides the riches of art and ornament proved the liberality of kings and lords whose daughters had made profession of religion in this convent. The church, a fine specimen of Gothic architecture of the fourteenth century, with towering spire overshadowing the cloister, with its nine frescoed chapels, was a real relic of art, and the eyes of the young Louise must have been dazzled when she entered it for the first time. The principal object of attention on entering the church was a painting of the king in robes embroidered in *fleur de lis*; this was above the gallery and opposite to the high altar, where, according to tradition, St. Louis, his patron, first saw the light of day. At the side of this painting was a statue of his queen, Marguerite of Provence, wearing the crown and robes of French royalty; here

were also monuments of their three sons. On all sides were statues and mausoleums of the most illustrious of these religious: Marie de Clermont, daughter of Robert of Bourbon, second Prioress, who passed seventy-eight years in the cloister; Marguerite of France, daughter of King Jean; Marie de Bourbon, sister-in-law of Charles V.; Marie, daughter of Charles VII.; Isabelle d'Artois; and Marie of Brittany,—all of whom preferred the solitude of this cloister to the splendor of the court.

In this sanctuary Louise was to approach the Holy Table for the first time. The details of this memorable event are wanting; but we may presume that it took place attended by all the exterior solemnity peculiar to so great an act, as religious ceremonies at Poissy were all conducted with great pomp, and the effect heightened by the presence of two hundred Dominicans around an altar on which the piety of kings had accumulated reliquaries of precious stones and vases of massive gold sparkling with diamonds.

If this magnificence of worship impressed the young girl with awe, her memory became richly stored, and could recall without effort these reminiscences of this ancient abbey.

National history might be said to be learned by instinct in a place inhabited for three centuries almost exclusively by kings, who left their names by their peculiarities on the rooms they occupied. Mary Stuart stayed there; Francis II. held a chapter of St. Michael there. In the convent parlor Catherine de' Medici

convoked that famous assembly of Catholics and Protestants known as the Conference of Poissy.

The Bourbons remained faithful to the benevolent traditions of Valois, so that Louise might one day have seen the young prince, afterwards Louis XIII., leading a young-lady postulant, Mlle. de Frontenac, to the altar to take the veil. How little Louise dreamed that forty years after she would invoke that royal child in behalf of another institution of which God alone had then conceived the thought and prepared the future! Let us not anticipate, however, but return to our story.

At Poissy ancient and modern literature were successfully cultivated by the religious, many of whom became familiar with the works of Homer. We are not certain whether or not Louise learned the Latin she knew so well from Sister Odeau, who at that time translated the sermons of St. Bernard and dedicated them to the Prioress, Mme. de Gondy.* She certainly exercised her memory in learning by heart the charming poetry of Anne de Marquet, the literary glory of the monastery and considered one of the most distinguished minds and the best Hellenist of her time, who had just departed for the beautiful "garden of the skies" which her verses so charmingly sing,

"Where roses of damask and lilies of white
Fade not, but are ever enchanting the sight."

* Collection of the particulars of Mlle. Le Gras' last illness. Confirmed by the letters of St. Vincent. (Arch. de la Mission.)

In this magnificent monastery, however, there reigned a spirit which savored too much of the world, for the austere habits of M. de Marillac, and Louise was removed from this convent. As she took her departure, nothing could have made her suspect her vocation and destiny. Can one believe that from the height of paradise the royal patron of France, whose cradle had overshadowed her early years, foresaw that peaceful army of virgins who would one day succeed his knights on the banks of the Orient? History is full of these providential coincidences whose meaning is only discovered by time.

M. de Marillac, on the return of his daughter to Paris, placed her in the hands of a preceptress whom he charged with the care of finishing her education. He wished that nothing should be omitted that could contribute to her mental and physical development. While bodily exercise was not forgotten, she applied herself to the cultivation of the arts; above all, painting, for which she had a decided taste, and which she never entirely abandoned. Discovering in her, besides this, a remarkable aptitude for abstract truths, he wished her to pursue the study of philosophy. By this means, as her first biographer tells us,* she gained access to the highest sciences, and reading, pen in hand, soon became one of her favorite occupations. Her conversational powers were so charming that her father soon knew no greater pleasure than

* "La Vie de Mademoiselle Le Gras, fondatrice et première Supérieure de la Compagnie des Filles de la Charité, Servantes des pauvres

to converse with her, or read the result of her reflections ; and he averred, when writing his will, that his daughter had been his greatest consolation in this world, and a sweet rest which God had given him in the afflictions of this life.

This rugged cultivation prepared the ground of her soul for great fruits of virtue, which soon began to bud forth. M. de Marillac, a provident and intelligent father, had sought to develop in his daughter a taste for solid matter, only that she might be far removed from frivolity, and might understand something of a serious, holy life.

At the age of fifteen or sixteen, Louise had given herself to the practice of prayer,* and was not slow to conceive a contempt for the world and an ardent desire to consecrate herself to God. This thought occupied her mind a long time before she could determine to what Order she was called. It is not surprising that she never thought of the abbey at Poissy, where fervor had cooled and the rule was no longer in vigor ; but it is a little astonishing that neither was she attracted by a great religious Order recently brought from Spain to Paris, which was creating a sensation by the practice of incomparable virtue.

The interest in this new convent was nowhere more

malades," by M. Gobillon, Priest and Doctor of the Sorbonne, Curé of St. Laurent. Paris : André Pralard. 1676.

* Letter of Mathurine Guérin, Daughter of Charity, to Marguerite Chétif, on the virtues of Mlle. Le Gras. (Arch. de la Mission.)

lively than in the Marillac family ; and Louise was not ignorant of the active part one of her uncles had taken in the establishment of this new convent of Carmelites, or Carmelines as they were called, nor the secret of the truly extraordinary way in which he had been led into the work. Towards the close of the summer of 1602, M. Michel de Marillac, having found by chance, in one of the bookstores, a copy of the "Life and Miracles of B. Mother Teresa," he bought it and took it with him on a pilgrimage to Notre Dame de Liesse. Scarcely had he commenced to read, when, seized with admiration at her fervent reform of the Carmelites in Spain, he heard an interior voice intimating that he should introduce the Order into France. So many difficulties arose in his mind in this connection that at first he resisted the impression ; but, conquered by a superior Will, he at length yielded and became, as Mme. Acarie had predicted, "the foundation-stone of the French Carmelites."

He it was who prepared and watched over the building of the beautiful convent in Rue Saint-Jacques. "A beautiful dwelling," said Mlle. de Montpensier, "where a numerous community is composed of women of rank and intelligence, who had left a world they knew only to despise ; *there*, consequently, will you find true religious." Nevertheless, and in spite of all that might attract Louise to Carmel,—even the ties of kindred between her and Mother Madeleine de Saint Joseph, the greatest and perhaps the

most holy of that admirable company,—the idea of clothing herself as a daughter of Saint Teresa never entered her mind. God would not permit it, having other designs for her; neither would He permit her to follow very long another project which attracted her some time later.

A short time after the Carmelites were established in France, Paris was enriched by another Order of women, devoted no less than the Carmelites to prayer and penance. One day, in July 1606, the Parisians were astonished to see a procession of twelve religious women, with thorn-crowned heads and naked feet, each accompanied by a lady of rank, wending their way, preceded by twenty-four Capuchins and followed by the Cardinal Gondy, from the hôtel Vendôme, where they had rested, to the convent in Rue Saint-Honoré, newly erected by the liberality of the Duchess of Mercœur. These religious, who were Capuchins, were known as *Daughters of the Passion*, and it was said that no community surpassed them in austerities. Their life seemed to respond so well to her aspirations that Louise at first thought of joining them; and if we remember what she wrote at a later period concerning a first vow, we may suppose that she had made some sort of promise in the depth of her heart, a promise very soon annulled by the decision of an authority without appeal. Not among the Capuchins, any more than among the Carmelites, had God placed her vocation, and the person chosen to divert

her from that design was one of whom a holy bishop wrote: "We have no miracles to prove a sanctity greater or more apparent than his." This was Father Honoré de Champigny, at that time provincial of the Capuchins in Paris.* Over twenty years in charge of the most important business of his Order, and in the exact performance of his rule, he won respect and confidence by his sweet, humble virtue, and Mlle. de Marillac had no difficulty in opening her heart to him.

Father Honoré, in whom prudence had always been a distinguishing virtue, saw at a glance that her health was entirely too delicate for the attempt. He judged it proper to give her the advice he had already given to several young girls: "If we gather the flowers too soon, we hinder the fruit from growing; but when they fade and fall of themselves, the fruit is abundant." And, foreseeing the future by the light often vouchsafed him for the good of souls, he told Louise that God had other designs in store for her.†

At this time Louise lost her father. Necessitated by circumstances to come to some decision with regard to her life, and interpreting the advice

* The monastery of the Capuchins was opposite the convent at the junction of the Rue de Rivoli, Rue Castiglione, and Rue du Mont-Thabor. At this time they had a number of celebrated men, amongst them a cousin of Mlle. Le Gras, Brother Michel, who died in the odor of sanctity 1631.

† "Histoire de la Vie, Mort, et Miracles du Rév. Père Honoré Bouchart de Champigny," by Henry de Calais. The process of his beatification was begun in 1635 and has been taken up again recently.

she had received, she accepted the hand of a young Secretary of State under Marie de' Medicis, Antoine Le Gras, whose family, like the Marillacs, was originally from Auvergne.* The charity of the Le Gras' was traditional and extended to the town of Puy, where they had founded an hospital. All this had some weight in the eyes of Mlle. de Marillac, herself so kind to the poor, who saw in this quality of her new family a pledge of what she would be permitted to do in her turn. The marriage was celebrated in the church of Saint-Gervais,† Feb. 5, 1613. Louise was then twenty-one years and some months old.

By a singular coincidence, on that very day, and in the same place, there was baptized a child, called by his parents René Alméras,‡ who, half a century later, became first Superior-General of the Daughters of Charity, after Vincent de Paul, and directed the work whose foundress was at this time hidden from the eyes of all.

* Antoine Le Gras was born at Montferrand, where is still to be seen the house that once was his.

† The register of the parish of Saint-Gervais, where mention was made of the marriage of "M. Antoine Le Gras et de demoiselle Loyse de Marillac," appears to have been burnt during the Commune of 1871. (Jal. author of "Dictionnaire Critique de Biographie et d'Histoire".)

‡ René Almeras, born in Paris, parish of Saint-Gervais, Feb. 5, 1613, was received into the Congregation of the Mission Dec. 24, 1637, and succeeded Saint Vincent de Paul as Superior-General Jan. 17, 1661.

CHAPTER II.

1613—1623.

Birth of her Son—Her Acquaintance with St. Francis de Sales and with Mgr. Camus, Bishop of Belley, her Director—Her Vow not to Remarry—Interior Trials.



THE FAMILY into which Louise had just entered did not belong to the nobility. The Le Gras' had never attained to anything higher than a good and honorable middle class. Antoine and Nicolas his brother, despite their straitened circumstances, owed the positions they occupied to their own exertions and to many pecuniary sacrifices. One of them, we have said, was Secretary to Marie de' Medicis, the other Treasurer of France.* Antoine's title of Esquire did not permit the wife who bore his name to be styled *Madame*, and Louise continued, therefore, to receive no other title than that of *Mademoiselle*. Although this usage was changed in the eighteenth century, the custom continues in the family of St. Vincent de Paul, and the Daughters of Charity still say *Mademoiselle* when

* The title Treasurer of France is given to Nicolas on the parish register of Saint-Gervais, where his marriage with Madeleine Le Roux was celebrated Jan. 22, 1613. After his brother's death he purchased for 5000 livres the position of Secretary of State from the Queen Mother, and exercised the same under Anne of Austria. He died Aug. 12, 1646.

speaking of their foundress; nor would we deem it right to destroy the tradition by modifying an appellation consecrated by the respect of almost three centuries.

Unfortunately there remain but few details of the new life opened to Louise. The pillage of St. Lazare, in which were destroyed numerous letters and documents belonging to the Mission, deprives us of much information which cannot now be supplied. We know that she attached herself to her husband with an affection proportioned to the esteem he merited by his God-fearing, irreproachable life.* Her efforts to inspire her son with grateful remembrance of his father, and her fidelity in celebrating the anniversary of her marriage by a Mass and Holy Communion, are lights which reveal the sweetness of their union.†

The blessing of God was not long delayed, and on Oct. 19, 1613, she gave birth to a son, who was baptized in the church of St. Merry, receiving the name of Michel Antoine, and having for godfather René de Marillac, member of the Privy Council, and for godmother Valence de Marillac, wife of M. d'Attichy, Comptroller of Finance‡ under the king and his mother the queen.

Separated from the life and maxims of the world,§ far from the court she seems to have altogether abandoned at this time, the young mother passed her days in the serious discharge of her duties. The educa-

* Will of Mlle. Le Gras. † See will, and letters of St. Vincent de Pau.

‡ Jal. quoted in this work.

§ Gobillon, p. 12.

tion of her son, the care of servants, whom she led to the very threshold of perfection—for two of them left her to enter religion, one with the Minims, the other with the Benedictines,—the superintendence of her affairs and at times those of her husband, who was the guardian of the five orphan children of Mme. d'Attichy*—all these occupied her by turns, without interrupting the union of her soul with God. Free to follow her attraction for the poor, she frequently visited them. Neither bad roads nor inclement weather hindered her. A woman in her service† relates that she would tear herself from the company of M. Le Gras, and through rain and frost, often shivering with cold, would climb the mountains to comfort an unfortunate, or carry biscuits, sweetmeats, and other delicacies to the sick.

The same witness of her daily life testifies that she washed the sick, combed them, and buried the dead. Moreover, she often fasted at table while pretending

* Letters from M. de Marillac to Mlle. Le Gras dated Sept. 12, 1619, tell us that she accompanied her husband to Attichy, and labored with zeal in the administration of this estate. She herself wrote to St. Vincent, "My late husband spent his time and life in the business of the house of Attichy." Of the five children whose interests were confided to them, one followed the profession of arms, and was killed in 1636; another became a Jesuit; and a third died Bishop of Autun. The two daughters were Anne, maid of honor to Marie de Medicis, who became later on the beautiful Countess de Maure, celebrated by M. Cousin; and Geneviève, who married the Duke of Atri.

† Madame Delacour. The document containing these details is preserved by the Daughters of Charity.

to eat, and at night, as soon as M. Le Gras was asleep, she arose and spent the night in her oratory. Was not this the life of a saint?

In 1618-19 she was living in the parish of St. Sauveur,* Rue Cours-au-Villain,† in an old house which had to be repaired, and a new story added with a tower, the expense amounting to 18,000 livres, as is shown by letters from the architect employed. Everything tends to prove that it was here she received the visit of St. Francis de Sales, who passed eight months in Paris,‡ when he accompanied the Cardinal of Savoy on a mission relative to the marriage of Prince Victor Amédée, of Piedmont, to Christine, sister of Louis XIII. Mlle. Le Gras made his acquaintance with all the more pleasure, as on a preceding journey the holy prelate had met M. Michel de Marillac at Mme. Acarie's house § in Marais, to which place he walked every day from the upper end of Rue St. Jacques. When he visited Mlle. Le Gras he was stopping in Rue de Tournon, in an old castle belonging to the Marshal of Ancre. From this place, then the palace of the plenipotentiary, he came, fol-

* The church of St. Sauveur was situated at the corner of Rue St. Sauveur and Rue St. Denis. In 1787 it threatened to fall, and was demolished, and on this spot was built the house known as 277 Rue St. Denis. ("Histoire de la Ville et du Diocèse de Paris".)

† Rue Cours-au-Villain, or Courteau-Villain as it is sometimes written, is part of Rue Montmorency, and extends from Rue Beaubourg to Rue du Temple.

‡ From Nov. 1618 to Sept. 15, 1619.

§ Letter of St. Francis de Sales to M. de Marillac, April 24, 1621.

lowing his attraction for great souls, to visit Mlle. Le Gras, who was confined to her house by indisposition. She never forgot his kindness on this occasion, nor his advice, which she afterwards made use of in the direction of her Daughters. The penances prescribed by "our blessed Father," ‡ as she usually called him, the books he composed, were, for her, so many rules which she gladly followed; and confident of his intercession, she believed in its effect in one of the most critical moments of her life (as we shall presently relate).

Her acquaintance with St. Francis was not of long duration, however, for in September 1619 the Saint returned to his mountains, after having preached every day, sometimes oftener, in Paris, whose religious spirit very much affected him. "Piety has made admirable progress in Paris," he wrote, "*che è un stupore.*"*

When he left Paris Mlle. Le Gras was under the direction of one whom the Saint called his only son, his apprentice, and his *chef-d'œuvre*, because the only person consecrated by him. This was Mgr. Camus, Bishop of Belley. When and how Louise placed herself under his direction does not appear. We know from Mgr. Camus himself that several years before this time he had been invited regularly to preach the Advent and Lenten sermons in Paris.†

* Letter of Abbé de Vaux, Jan. 3, 1642.

† *Ho trovato Parigi con tanto accrescimento di divozione che è un stupore.* Nov. 9, 1618. (Migne, vol. vi. p. 767.)

‡ Probably from 1614 to 1623.

"Not from choice or my own seeking," he adds, "but by the interposition of my parents, who, not being able to see me or induce me to leave my residence, took this means to bring me to Paris."* He owed these invitations no less, we may believe, to his powers of oratory; for although his style was somewhat diffuse and full of metaphor, yet its richness and his eloquence were much relished at that time.

Louise might have heard him in the church of Saint-Severin, or Saint-Jacques-de-la-Boucherie, or in the Augustinian Chapel,† or the Oratory,‡ where he preached Conferences for four winters. If she was charmed by his eloquence, she was no less attracted by his fervent piety and boundless charity, virtues assiduously cultivated by St. Francis in this his disciple, in whom he endeavored to excite a maternal tenderness for the flock confided to his care.§ We venture to affirm that not one amongst these souls corresponded better to his zeal than Mlle. Le Gras.||

The mild, firm direction given her by the Bishop of Belley is recognized at once by the spiritual aliment he

* "Notice sur Mgr. Camus," by Mgr. Depéry, Bishop of Gap.

† The convent of the Augustinians was situated opposite Pont Neuf, where is now held the "Vallée" market.

‡ The Oratory, founded Nov. 11, 1611, by M. de Bérulle, was then on Rue St. Thomas du Louvre, quite near the hotel of Rambouillet.

§ "Esprit de Saint François de Sales," by Mgr. Camus.

|| Another penitent of Mgr. Camus, little known at this time, was Claude Bernard, called *the poor priest*, who owed his conversion to the Bishop; he gave his property to the poor, and spent his life attending the sick and the prisoners. He died 1641.

recommended, and by the books he proposed to nourish her persevering taste for prayer: all these are of the highest order. After the "Imitation of Christ," which M. de Marillac had just popularized by a new translation,* the works of Louis of Grenada, the "Spiritual Combat," which St. Francis de Sales carried about him for eight years, "Philothea,"† and the "Treatise on the Love of God," by the Bishop of Geneva, then published only a few years. To these books, which were, as Mme. de Maintenon said, "sufficient for a lifetime," the study of the Bible was added, for Louise had been reading with her husband a translation by the Doctors of the Louvain, as we learn by a note from her to the Bishop of Belley.‡ Retreats with the Capuchins of the Rue Saint-Honoré at different times during the year, such as the Carnival, etc., completed the exercises of her interior life.

After passing some days at the Chartreuse, Mgr. Camus could not refrain from writing to his spiritual daughter: "I am charmed with the solitude and sweetness of a retreat." § It was easy to inspire her with the same sentiments, or rather it was necessary to moderate her zeal for these exercises, useful and salutary though they might be. "You must take

* This translation appeared anonymously in 1621. It has since gone through fifty editions.

† It is said that the "Introduction to a Devout Life" appeared under this name 1606; "The Treatise of the Love of God," 1616.

‡ Dated Paris, May 8, 1623. (Arch. de la Mission.)

§ July 26, 16... (Arch. de la Mission.)

them like honey," he wrote, "rarely and in small quantities, for you have a certain spiritual avidity which must be restrained."

Her fervor needed to be moderated likewise in the practice of penance, a virtue which she did not believe to be a legacy exclusively for convents, although such is the general opinion of the world. To enliven her devotion* St. Francis de Sales had recommended the discipline. Her dress was simple and modest, underneath which she wore hair-cloth, and in spite of her delicate health conquered, by fasts and watching, the warmth of a nature already subdued by suffering and the labor inseparable from her duties. New calls to greater sacrifices were always the answer of God to these efforts to attain the highest paths of perfection. Humility, obedience, poverty, and charity always appeared to her in their ideal beauty, and "to honor Jesus Christ," as she wrote later, she always took the resolution inspired by His love.

But that filial confidence which, delighting the heart, fills it with holy peace, was the constant theme of Mgr. Camus to his penitent. Her exquisite delicacy of conscience, her extreme fear of sin making her see evil in things indifferent, her dread of having to reproach herself with past confessions badly made, sometimes clouded her otherwise clear, strong mind.

"You always make a general confession when jubilee comes," wrote Mgr. Camus; "how often have I told you the effect of these general confessions on

* Letter of Mlle. Le Gras, Jan. 3, 1642.

your poor heart. Ah, no; the jubilee is not sent for that, but to make us rejoice in God our Saviour; to make us say, *Jubilemus Deo in salutari nostro.*"* In another letter he writes, "I still await the return of your serenity after those clouds which hinder you from seeing in full brilliancy the beauty of serving God. Do not make so many difficulties of indifferent things. Turn your eyes from yourself to fix them on Jesus Christ. This is, according to my judgment, your perfection, and I may add with the Apostle, 'In this I have the spirit of God.'"

The Bishop of Belley was not the only one to reproach her with this fault of reflecting too much on herself—a reproach she afterwards made use of for the preservation of her Daughters.† M. de Marillac, her uncle, well acquainted with her spiritual tendencies, often warned her of her danger. After many disquieting and long-continued efforts to know herself as every Christian should, Louise was constrained to limit her reflections to her miseries, and thus increase her humility. "Good and useful thoughts," her uncle would say to her, "but not always in season. To acquire virtue it is necessary for us to profit by the means which God gives us; that is, to rise by means of our faults above the disposition which produced them, to humble ourselves before those in whom we perceive any good, and, this done, to believe ourselves wanting in the knowledge of our-

* Letter of Mgr. Camus, Jan. 20. (Arch. de la Mission.)

† Letter of Sr. Mathurine Guérin to Sr. Marguerite Chétif.

selves, but not to be troubled on that account, and to ask this knowledge from God." *

This was only the beginning of her interior trials. After this anxiety on the subject of her sins, which God permitted to trouble her many years.† Louise was violently agitated by scruples of another kind. We find the subject of this illusion in a private paper found among her effects, where she mentions the promise to herself already spoken of, and to which her extreme delicacy of conscience lent the appearance of a vow. This evidently refers to the time when she wished to embrace a religious life among the Capuchins. Notwithstanding all that her reason could suggest to reassure her, she constantly asked herself if she had not failed in her promise to God; therefore to calm her fears and follow her attraction she made a vow not to remarry should her husband (then in delicate health) die before her. This was on the Feast of St. Monica, May 4, 1623.

This sacrifice was made with all the generosity peculiar to the ardent soul of Louise. She had a right to hope for peace, but found it not. Strange spectacle! but one we can understand when we remember what tempests the saints have all withstood, or meditate in the light of faith on the incessant efforts made by the Spirit of Darkness to dispute with God the possession of those very souls whose lives are purest and most faithful in virtue.

This complete offering of herself, faithful and

* Letter, Aug 12, 1621. (Arch. de la Mission.) † Gobillon, p. 16.

prompt answer to the call of Him who wished her entire being, marked a decided step in the interior life of Mlle. Le Gras. It was like the first light of the aurora. Need we wonder if the Devil now subjected her to an assault more terrible still than those by which she had heretofore been tormented? On Ascension Day,* three weeks after her vow, "she fell anew," she tells us, "into great depression of mind." Her spiritual horizon was at once in great obscurity, and the pangs of anguish which combated without excluding one another gave her soul such torment as she had never before experienced. At first she asked herself (and this was the real subject of the temptation) if she ought to remain with her husband, or if she were not obliged from that moment to leave him, in order to repair her former vow and be more at liberty to serve God. At the very time she believed herself bound to complete this holocaust another sacrifice appeared to her not less necessary.

The Bishop of Belley, to whom she could submit her doubts, inspired her with unlimited confidence; but was she not obliged, by reason of her attachment to him, to choose another confessor? Deprived of his direction, separated from her husband and son, what a solitude life would be to her! Could she, at least, rest on God, and in His divine tenderness find a compensation for her sacrifices? No. Her abandonment should be complete. Doubts against faith assailed her mind; the immortality of the soul, even the exist-

* May 25, 1623.

ance of the Creator, appeared to her enveloped in thick darkness; and this terrible question presented itself: "If there be no eternity, no divinity, what remains for me?"

These storms, it seems, should have produced a calm. If Louise had made a vow and was obliged to accomplish it, surely God willed it. But temptation tarnishes with its breath the mirror of reason. The soul, though faultless, which is subjected to the scorching influence of temptation loses for a time the brilliancy of her faculties; her power to memorize, clearness in deduction, good sense to draw conclusions—all is gone: during temptation logic is annihilated.

"For ten days," writes Mlle. Le Gras, "these three uncertainties held my soul in such agony as seemed to me worse than could be imagined." She knew not in whom to confide her troubles. The Bishop of Geneva was the only one who could relieve her, she said, had he been there. She had thought of consulting him on the subject of her vow, but he was dead * before she had an opportunity to do so.

At last God had pity on her. "The day of Pentecost," † she said (and on this solemn subject we can do no better than let her speak herself), "being in Saint-Nicolas-des-Champs at the holy Mass, in an instant my mind was cleared—my doubts vanished. I was taught that I should remain with my husband; that a day would come when I could make the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, and that I would

* December 28, 1622.

† June 4, 1623.

be with persons some of whom would make the same vows. I understood that it was to be a place in which I could assist my fellow-beings; but I could not understand how it was to be accomplished, as it appeared to me all coming and going"—evidently no cloister; and by this we can understand what the new work was which should be confided to her. "I was, moreover, assured that I would be in peace concerning my director; that God would give me one whom I should see presently. I felt a great repugnance to this change; but I acquiesced, and it seemed as if the change were deferred for the present. My third trial was removed by the conviction that it was God who was teaching me the above, and being in God I ought not to doubt of the rest." She thus concludes: "I always believe that this grace was granted me through the Bishop of Geneva. I had proof of this at the time which I cannot now call to mind."

We must remark here a singular coincidence which seems to have escaped Louise. The holy prelate of whom she has just spoken, and for whom she had such devotion, had, unknown to her, passed through a siege of temptation similar to her own. Like her, also, he was a prey to the attack of the enemy, after having made a vow of perfect chastity until death, and like her, again, peace returned to his soul while praying in a church in Paris.* Every trial is

* At Saint-Étienne-des-Grès, before a statue of our Lady of Good

providential; St. Francis drew from this one a sincere and tender pity for tempted souls, to whom he often addressed these consoling words: "Alas! it is a strange torment; my own soul, which endured similar suffering for six long weeks, can well compassionate those who are thus afflicted." He also acquired "a certain tact in the government of his spiritual warfare," to speak in the language of his biographer, the Bishop of Belley, who styles him "an arsenal for others, furnishing shields and arms to those whose temptations were made known to him." * May we not believe that, taking pity on the sufferings whose bitterness he had tasted, he answered from high heaven the call of Louise?

As to the humble woman, we could not recount all the fruits she gathered from the thorns and brambles with which her road seemed at one time to be entangled. It was like a second baptism, from which her soul emerged purer, stronger, more grateful. She had foreseen her work and the graces that would enable her to accomplish it; the one who was to be her guide was shown her; the entire plan of her life, her itinerary, so to speak, was opened before her. Called to form souls, she was, like St. Francis de Sales, to imbibe from the memory of that interior agony compassion for their misery and experience of their tribulations.

Help, still venerated in the chapel of Hospitallers of Saint-Thomas-de Villeneuve, Rue de Sèvres.

* "Spirit of Saint Francis de Sales," part IV. sec. 15.

CHAPTER III.

1623—1625.

St. Vincent de Paul—The Family of Marillac and the Carmelites—
Sickness and Death of M. Le Gras.



FOR almost ten years Mgr. Camus came every winter, as we have said, to preach in Paris. In 1623, about the Feast of All Saints, he was preparing to go as usual, when an unforeseen circumstance compelled him to remain in his diocese. We can easily imagine the emotion his absence caused in Mlle. Le Gras, accustomed as she had been to find in him a support and guide amid the fears and aspirations of her soul. Hence he wished to prepare her for it from October. "This miserable father who writes to you will not visit Paris this winter," he wrote her; and as if to strengthen her for the trial he added: "O Jesus, Soul of our souls! preserve my dear daughter to me; . . . shed Thy consolations on her soul; bless her with Thy sweet hand, herself, her husband, her child, and her house."* This separation was not to end the spiritual relations between Louise and her guide; but letters were sometimes six weeks going from Paris to Belley,† and the definite resignation which the prelate now made of the two principal pulpits‡

* Letter of Mgr. Camus, Oct. 23, 1623. (Arch. de la Mission.)

† Ibid., Jan. 20.

‡ Ibid., Oct. 23.

of the capital deprived Mlle. Le Gras of all hope of seeing him soon. She was therefore resigned to accept from him another director whom Providence had brought quite near.

She had often met in the neighborhood of her dwelling, or at the church of Saint Sauveur, their parish,* a priest, affable, grave, and simple at first sight, who was known as M. Vincent. This priest, this saint, was to exercise too great an influence over her destiny for us to neglect a rapid glance at the good he had already accomplished.

No life for the last two centuries, perhaps, has been oftener written than that of St. Vincent de Paul. Hence it is almost superfluous to say that he was born April 24, 1576, in the midst of religious wars, at Pouy, near Dax, of a family of the working class. From this humble origin, which he took pleasure in recalling to Mlle. Le Gras, he imbibed that tender love for the poor which he manifested from his earliest years! Having like David left his father's flock to receive the holy unction, Vincent suddenly found himself, by an untoward circumstance, cast on a barbarous shore and made a slave. To this very shore his sons were to carry the Cross and the liberty of the Gospel; and the first fruit of his own labors was the conversion of his master, a r  negade from Nice, whom Vincent brought to Rome and to the convent of *Fate bene, Fratelli*.

He returned to France on a secret mission for

* The Hotel de Gondy, where St. Vincent lived at that time, was in the Rue Pav  e

Henry IV., and became chaplain to Queen Marguerite, and afterwards pastor in the little village of Clichy. Cardinal Berulle, his friend, then appointed him tutor to the children of M. de Gondy, General of the Galleys.* This modest position furnished him with opportunities for the exercise of his zeal among the numerous servants and followers of the family; and by placing him in Paris a great part of the year, permitted him to continue his charge as Superior of the Visitation Monastery, confided to his care by St. Francis de Sales.

This preference for a priest still young over many eminent men then in the ranks of the Sorbonne and college of Navarre, made by a prelate whose advice was known to be, "Choose as director one in ten thousand,"† and who possessed the gift of discernment of souls in an eminent degree, this preference, we repeat, strengthened the advice of Mgr. Camus, and Louise hesitated not to place herself under the direction of Vincent de Paul. Vincent, already occupied by outside works, would not willingly burden himself with the care and direction of souls; but he could not refuse Mlle. Le Gras when she came to him from the Bishop of Belley. This was probably in the beginning of the year 1625.‡

* Philippe-Emmanuel Gondy, Count of Joigny, Baron of Villepreux and Montmirail, brother of Henry de Gondy, Bishop of Paris, and of Jean-François de Gondy, first Archbishop of Paris, was father of Cardinal de Retz.

† "Introduction to a Devout Life," part i. chap. iv.

‡ Maynard in his "*Histoire de Saint Vincent de Paul*" says that

She was not slow to appreciate the merits of her new guide, and soon recognized that it was he whom God had shown her two years before. Everything in him inspired confidence. In exterior appearance he did not seem intended for brilliant affairs ; but whilst the most humble of men, he excelled in wisdom, good common-sense, and prudence. The number or the difficulty of affairs never seemed to trouble him ; he undertook them in order and carried them through with patience and tranquillity. Fear of interfering with the designs of Providence made him slow to give his opinion, and he decided nothing without balancing the reasons for and against; and when questioned, always waited a few moments before he answered. His decision once taken, he replied : " In the name of the Lord," and expressed his ideas in few words, with perfect clearness and in a tone of affectionate persuasion. His two favorite maxims were: " To love God in the strength of the arm and the sweat of the brow, and in every condition of our neighbor to see an image of Jesus Christ, loving and serving Jesus Christ in each one, and each one in Jesus Christ." This was his lesson to his penitents, teaching them to see nothing new in devotion, but to make their charity more constant and more pure.

All this answered so well to what Louise was in the Saint refused the request of Mgr. de Belley to take charge of Mlle. Le Gras until he spoke to him of his venerated friend St. Francis de Sales ; but we do not find sufficient grounds for such assertion.

search of that she could not dispense with his advice ; and in July 1625, when Vincent went to Provence to acquaint M. Gondy with the news of his wife's death, Louise was so afflicted by his absence that Mgr. Camus, who still watched over her from a distance, was obliged to moderate her grief. "Pardon me, my dear sister," he wrote her on this occasion, "when I tell you that you attach yourself too strongly to those who direct you ; you lean too much on them. M. Vincent disappears, and behold, Mlle. Le Gras is out of sorts ! We must look well to God in those who guide and direct us, and sometimes we must look to God alone, who, without the aid of man or Bethsaida's pond, can heal our spiritual paralysis. It is not, dear soul," he adds (so much did he admire her virtue)—"it is not that it annoys me to conduct or counsel you. Alas ! no. On the contrary, I hope that you will lead me to heaven, whither your example invites me more than my advice is calculated to have in leading you thither ; but I do not like to see the least little imperfection or the least little cloud in the mind of that Mlle. Le Gras of whom I expect such great things, and whose mind I believe to be so strong."* It was, in fact, her strong faculties of mind that made these slight shades remarkable. In others they would have been unperceived.

The letter of Mgr. Camus just quoted shows us that in the absence of the "very good M. Vincent" her soul was not neglected, and that she knew to

* Arch. de la Mission.

whom she could have recourse. The Bishop of Belley sent her Father Menard* of the Oratory, for a retreat which she wished to make; afterwards he desired her to consult two holy religious, Anne Catherine of Beaumont, a remarkable Superioress of the Visitation,† and the venerable Mother Madeleine of Saint Joseph, the first French Prioress of the Carmelites. This lady had just founded what was called *the little convent* in the Rue Chapon, quite near Louise.‡ Quite near her, also, were grouped a number of religious women, many of whom had been under the direction of Mgr. Camus, and to whom he frequently sent remembrances by Louise, mentioning their names with affectionate and paternal admonition. Most of these names are now buried in oblivion, and we only mention Mlle. Pollalion (to whom we shall soon return) and Anne d'Attichy,—with her good heart,—and another whom we must not forget, the virtuous widow, Mme. de Marillac.

* This name is probably Mayniard. Little attention was paid at that time to the orthography of names. Father Charles Mayniard became pastor of Rouen. He had great devotion for the study of the Scriptures, and was known to say that other books were only fit to nourish curiosity.

† Anne Catherine of Beaumont, who came from Annecy with Mme. de Chantal, was the second Superioress of the first monastery in Paris. She founded a second monastery in the Faubourg Saint-Jacques, and governed successively several houses of the Order. Her life, still unpublished, was written by Mother de Chaugy.

‡ The "little convent" extended from No. 13 Rue Chapon, along the Rue Beaubourg, to No. 10 of the Rue Cours-au-Villain, where Mlle. Le Gras was living.

In her own family, indeed, Louise had the most beautiful example and support resulting from holy friendship. But she who most attracted the attention of Mgr. Camus by her exalted virtue was an angelic soul, one of whom Michel de Marillac had said that she alone attached him to this world. This was the widow of René de Marillac, who was godfather to young Michel Le Gras.* She aspired only to the Carmelite Order, which she made a vow to enter as soon as her brother-in-law and Mother Madeleine would think the time had come. After four years of widowhood, free and permitted to follow her attraction, she entered the Carmelites, and was reunited to her sister-in-law and her three daughters.† But who can recount the profit Louise derived from her relationship with the head of this predestined family, or the spiritual conferences she enjoyed with him!‡ For this

* René de Marillac died in 1621 at the siege of Montauban, leaving his heart to the Carmelites at Poissy to be placed in the tomb of Mme. d'Acarie. Shortly after he appeared to Mother Madeleine of Saint Joseph, who saw him, she says, for a quarter of an hour clearly, and eminent in glory. (Letters of Mère Madeleine to M. de Marillac, cited in the manuscript of Lefèvre.)

† Her sister-in-law was Valence de Marillac, received into the Carmelites on the same day with Mme. Acarie, under the name of Sister Marie of the Blessed Sacrament. Her three daughters were Marie of Saint Michel, Marie Madeleine of the Incarnation, and Margaret Teresa of Jesus.

‡ The archives of the Mission preserve some of the letters of Michel de Marillac to his niece, which might be called letters of direction. They occur between the years 1619 and 1623. Several of these letters bear on the reverse sheet notes on the subject written

it would be necessary to know the extraordinary life of this Keeper of the Seals of France who for forty years transacted the most important state affairs, while in his private life he shared the austerities as well as the miraculous favors of the Carmelites. Visions of our Lord and the Blessed Virgin, sometimes corporeal, sometimes intellectual, and constant communication with the angels, were his recompense for a piety and recollection apparently irreconcilable with the agitations of public life. So writes the magistrate who was his biographer.

Mlle. Le Gras, full of respect for her uncle and of confidence in him, found in this relationship that which was sought for by Mme. Acarie: "A holy friendship which produces neither separation from grace nor from tranquillity of mind, but rather helps us to approach to God in whom we love each other." *

Thus the Lord multiplied helps to strengthen his servant in the trial. This was not slow in coming, and was perhaps the most difficult to bear of all trials; that is, the sufferings of those who are dear to us.

The health of M. Le Gras was undermined. In the autumn of 1623 he had been at death's door; since then his constant sufferings had produced sadness and irritability. In these circumstances, which gave Louise an occasion to practice the works of her vocation, she redoubled her affection and tenderness,

by Mlle. Le Gras. The B. Marie of the Incarnation valued much these spiritual letters of M. de Marillac.

* Words of B. Marie of the Incarnation, recorded by Lefèvre.

and was assiduous in her efforts to assist her husband. "She wanted neither skill nor intelligence for the task," said Mgr. Camus, and the courage he had wished for her, "that she might bear the cross as a child of the Cross," failed her not. The grace of God perfected what the love of a Christian woman had begun in the soul of the sick man. Recovered from a brain-fever which had threatened his reason, M. Le Gras felt his fervor return with gratitude for the tender care bestowed on him, and practices of piety to which he had been a stranger now found a prominent place in his daily life. Every day he recited a portion of the Office, especially the Psalms, which inspired him with devotion, while the Passion of our Lord became the subject of his almost uninterrupted meditation. His sufferings extended over his entire body, and his nights were sleepless; yet those who waited on him never found his patience fail.

At last severe vomiting of blood announced the near approach of death, which finally occurred Dec. 21, 1625.* He died fortified by the sacraments of the Church, and without a distraction from the thought of God. His wife wrote of this event:† "I was alone

* Christofle Petit, priest in the church of Saint-Paul, who kept a journal of facts which he knew had occurred, tells us that the remains of M. Le Gras, having been brought to the church of Saint Sauveur, were interred in a vault in the chapel of Saint-Amable at Saint Paul's, Dec. 31, 1625. His brother-in-law, M. de Marillac, was already laid in the same place. The journal of M. Petit seems to have disappeared in the burning of the Hôtel de Ville in Paris, 1871.

† To Father Rebours, Carthusian, cousin of M. Le Gras.

to assist him in this important journey. It was night ; all he said to me was, ' Pray to God for me ; I can do so no longer '—words that shall ever remain engraven on my heart."

What this separation was for Louise we shall not attempt to describe. The best commentary on widowhood is the etymology of the word itself, *veuvage* ; that is to say, a void, with all its horror and all its agony. But this void God intended to fill. Crushed but not discouraged, Louise, after some hours beside the body of her husband, repaired to the church of Saint Sauveur, whose pastor * had shown a paternal kindness to her during all this cruel suffering. " All for the Divine Spouse now," she confessed, and received Him who had broken her bonds only to substitute others stronger and still more tender. This thought sustained her in her grief.† Mgr. Camus understood it, and he shortly after wrote to her in strong language worthy of her whom he addressed : " At last, my very dear sister, the Lord of our souls, having taken your spouse to his bosom, places Himself in yours. O Celestial Spouse, be ever such to my dear sister who chose you even when divided. Remain on her heart as a bouquet of myrrh, sweet to

* Jean Hollandre de Montdidier, rector of the University of Paris. He died May 21, 1628.

† " Providence placing me in a state of widowhood, gave me the grace of desiring to be united to Him for time and eternity." (Letter of Mlle. Le Gras to St. Vincent.)

the smell, but bitter to the taste." * And some weeks after, knowing her to be troubled and tempted to believe herself in darkness and desolation, he again wrote: "O daughter of little faith, why do you doubt? I must say to you as our Saviour said to Mary at the tomb of Lazarus: If you had more fortitude you would see the glory of God in you. How, I know not; but I believe it firmly."† Calm soon settled on the soul of Louise, and, like the Bishop of Belley, she waited, ready for anything that God might demand of her.


* Letter dated Feb. 22, Pont de Beauvoisin, the market-town of his diocese, where, "being the voice in the wilderness," he preached the Lenten sermons.

† March 26.

CHAPTER IV.

1625—1629.

Louise changes her Residence—New Rule of Life—The Confraternities of Charity—First Servant of the Poor.

“AMPS whose oil is aromatic shed a sweet odor when the light is extinguished,” says St. Francis de Sales. Hence widows whose love was pure in marriage shed the sweet odor of virtue when their light, that is their husband, is extinct by death.” “In the Church,” continues the same holy Doctor, “the true widow is the March violet, exhaling incomparable sweetness from the fervor of her devotion; hiding always under the large leaves of her abjection, her quiet, modest color reveals her mortification; and she ever seeks the uncultivated soil, lest worldly conversation should crush her and tarnish the freshness of her heart.”* Such was to be the future life of Louise: a life crushed in the eyes of worldlings, but transformed and wondrously purified in the sight of God. A short time after the death of her husband she wrote to a religious of her family: “Is it not now quite reasonable that I should belong entirely to God, after having been devoted to the world for so long? I wish it with all my heart, in whatever way

* “Introduction to a Devout Life,” part iv. chap. xi.

He pleases, although I have much reason to distrust myself." And she adds: "Cheer up, therefore, and help my poor soul to break its chains."

She did not lack the courage to break them herself. Wishing to follow up a plan in conformity with her new life, she resolved to leave the house she had occupied with her husband at Marais and take up her abode in a remote suburb of Paris, Rue Saint-Victor.* At a time when there were none of our fine roads, nor any of our marvellous means of rapid transit, placing in instant communication the extremities of a large city, her change of abode was tantamount to exile.†

It was the renunciation of the dwelling-place of the Marillacs and the neighborhood of a family so dear to her; it was tearing herself away from those friends that survive all others—the haunts of one's childhood; a separation from her whole past life: and hence was blamed by many outside of the immediate circle to which we refer.

The world criticised what it could not understand; but silence and forgetfulness soon followed, and there was nothing to disturb the solitude of Louise. The quarter of the city which she had selected was poor

* A letter of St. Vincent de Paul of October 8, 1627, is addressed "à Mlle. Le Gras, Rue Saint-Victor au logis où logeait M. Tiron, Saint-Priest." Another letter of a priest, M. Regourd, dated 1629, bears this inscription: "à Mlle. Le Gras, chez M. Gudoin, auditeur des comptes, Rue Saint-Victor."

† The city post was not established in Paris until 1653. The first omnibuses, or *carrosses publiques* (sic), date from 1664.

and chiefly inhabited by religious communities, and she there found precious conveniences in almost the very best means of education for her son, now her earnest and nearly her sole occupation.

On the declivity of the hill surmounted by the tomb of the patron of Paris stood quite a number of celebrated colleges,* from among which she chose the seminary of Saint-Nicolas, recently founded by M. Bourdoise.† Above all—and this it was that determined her choice—it brought her nearer to St. Vincent. A great change, which we must mention in a few words, had taken place in the life of her spiritual guide. Madame de Gondy had presented him with forty thousand livres for the purpose of establishing and extending on her estate his mission. From her brother-in-law, the Archbishop of Paris, she obtained for him at the same time a central position in a benefice situated near the gate of Saint-Victor.

This old house, built in the thirteenth century to accommodate thirteen pupils, retained its name of Collège des Bons-Enfants, although it had long been untenanted. Still detained in the world by the affec-

* Piganiol in his "*Description historique de la Ville de Paris*" gives more than thirty.

† The Seminary of Saint-Nicolas-du-Chardonnet took its name from the church beside it, and was erected for the double purpose of raising young clergymen and maintaining priests in their vocation by community life. St. Vincent considered this house one of the holiest in the Church of God. M. Bourdoise was predecessor of La Salle, and had founded a Christian school which was quite celebrated.

tion of his benefactors, Vincent took possession by installing a young priest, his disciple and friend, M. Portail,* and the year after, being freed from duty by the death of the pious countess, he hastened to join his disciple. The two pious friends would leave their key with a neighbor and set out together in answer to the invitations of bishops, going from village to village "to evangelize the poor, simply and in good faith as our Saviour had done." St. Vincent's stay at Bons-Enfants was short and irregular, and in consequence Mlle. Le Gras could not hope to see him as often as she needed except by remaining in the neighborhood. Such, we have said, was her principal motive in coming to this suburb, where ten years of her life were to be spent. For her and for St. Vincent it was a new phase of life begun; but whilst the Apostle was reproducing the active life of the Saviour, ignorant of the future, she sought only to honor the hidden life of Jesus at Nazareth—that period at once the longest and most mysterious of the stay of Jesus Christ amongst us; that silent, unknown life which had always been the object of her special devotion.† In order to establish the struc-

Antoine Portail, born in Beaucaire, diocese of Arles, Nov. 22, 1590, came to Paris at the age of 20, and placed himself under the direction of St. Vincent, who employed him immediately after his ordination in the spiritual service of the galleys. He lived with him in Rue Saint-Honoré until sent by St. Vincent to the College of Bons-Enfants.

† Letters of Saint Vincent, published by a priest of the Mission. Paris, 1881.

ture of her interior life on a solid and visible foundation, and instructed by the "Philothea," she wished to write with her own hand a sort of consecration which would be the contract of her union with Jesus Christ. This article, which cannot be read without interest, still bears the trace of St. Vincent's corrections. It is as follows:

"I, the undersigned, in the presence of the eternal God, having considered that, on the day of my holy baptism, I was vowed and dedicated to God to be His daughter, and that nevertheless I have so much and so many times sinned against His most holy will; considering, also, the immense mercy, love, and sweetness with which this good God has always maintained in me the desire to love and serve Him notwithstanding the guilt of my almost continual resistance, and although I have all my life neglected and abused the great graces which His goodness had given me,—unworthy, vile creature that I am,—coming at last to myself, I detest in my past life the iniquities which render me guilty of the death of Jesus Christ, and have deserved that I should be condemned worse than Lucifer. But, confiding in the mercy of God, I ask of Him pardon and full absolution as well for sins confessed as for those forgotten, and especially for the abuse I have made of the sacraments, being only a contempt of His goodness, for which I now repent with my whole heart, relying on the death of my Saviour as the only ground of my hope, and in virtue of which I renew

the promises made to God for me at my baptism, and I resolve irrevocably to love and serve Him with more fidelity, giving myself entirely to Him. For this purpose I renew my former vow of widowhood, and my resolutions to practise the holy virtues of humility, obedience, poverty, suffering, and charity, to honor these same virtues in Jesus Christ, and with which He so often inspired me by His love, protesting also never more to offend God by any portion of my being, and to abandon myself entirely to His holy Providence for the accomplishment of His will in me, to which I dedicate and sacrifice myself forever, choosing it for my chief consolation. I implore now the assistance of the Holy Spirit, should I happen by my accustomed weakness to do anything contrary to these sentiments that I may rise immediately, and not remain one instant an enemy to God. This is my irrevocable will, which I confirm in the presence of God, of the Holy Virgin, my good Angel, and all the Saints, before the Church Militant, which hears me in the person of my spiritual father, who, holding the place of God, must help me to accomplish these resolutions, according to the holy will of God." After thus invoking as witness of her resolutions all that is most august in heaven and on earth, Louise concludes by this prayer : " Be pleased, O my God, to confirm these resolutions and consecrations, and accept them in the odor of sweetness. As Thou hast inspired me to make them, give me grace to perform them. O my God ! Thou art my God and

my all! Thus I acknowledge and adore Thee, one only God in three Divine Persons, now and forever. May Thy love and the love of Jesus crucified live forever!

LOUISE DE MARILLAC.*

Here we may notice another writing of Mlle. Le Gras not less precious for us; that is, a rule which embraced all the details of her life, and was the sentiment of her act of consecration put into practical form. Drawn up at the suggestion of St. Vincent, this document becomes doubly interesting. First, because it gives us an example of the rules traced by the Saint for people in the world under his direction. These persons were few, of course, and already advanced in perfection. Secondly, because, in showing us the particular attractions of Louise, he lets us admire the first light of her vocation. "The object of my aspirations," she says, "is holy poverty; that, free from hindrance, I may follow Jesus Christ, and serve my neighbor in meekness and humility, living in obedience and chastity all my life." Poverty, chastity, and obedience were the virtues of the religious life which she was to approach as near as possible without being able to reach.

Louise fixed her hour of rising at half-past five from Easter to the Feast of All Saints, and at six o'clock for the rest of the year. Prayer immediately after rising. "Not shorter than one hour," she wrote

* It was thus, according to the custom of the time, that Mlle. Le Gras signed all her letters.

on the margin. The matter of her prayer was taken from the Gospels, or the life of the Saint of the day. Afterward she recited the Prime and Tierce of our Lady sedately, bearing in mind the meaning of prayer. Her domestic arrangements and orders for the household were attended to while dressing. Every day Mass, at half-past eight o'clock in summer, and at nine in winter; at one time uniting herself simply to the intention of the Church, at other times making use of the points given in "*Philothea*," or in another book called "*Dosithea*."

"Returning to her apartment, she will, to avoid idleness, work until eleven o'clock, then dine, after reading a chapter from —."* (The title of the book remains blank.) "At noon seven minutes' prayer to honor the Incarnation of the Word in the bosom of Mary. This over, she will go cheerfully to work, either for the Church or the poor, a two-fold and holy method of clothing Jesus Christ. Otherwise for her household; and this to continue till four o'clock, unless she has indispensable visits to make or receive. At four o'clock, when charity or propriety presents no obstacle, she will retire to the nearest church to recite Vespers from the Office of the Blessed Virgin. During the Office she will reflect on the half-hour's prayer which is to follow.

"The time remaining before supper to be divided between reading and sewing. At five o'clock exam-

* Probably the New Testament.

ination of conscience on the commandments of God and the duties of a Christian woman aspiring to perfection. The Office of Matins concludes the day, during which the Rosary also must find a place, with frequent elevations of the soul to God." "I will try," she writes, "to place myself in the presence of God at least four times every hour, exciting as much as possible the desire of His love. On the first Saturday of every month," she adds, "I shall renew my vows and good resolutions, reading my protestation before or after Holy Communion, and that on Saturday, because I have taken the Holy Virgin as a protectress against my weakness and inconstancy, and also that, by her intercession, I may, the rest of my life, honor the preference of God for virginity over marriage." Further on there is a void in the manuscript where the Communion days were indicated. She resolves to fight against two faults especially—vanity and too great exactness—and this by mortification and penance: the discipline two or three times a week, the cincture during the morning of Communion days and the whole of Friday; fasting not only during Advent and Lent, but also on Fridays, and on the eves of all festivals of our Lord, of the Blessed Virgin, and of the Saints, and two meals a day for the rest of the year. She wished to make two retreats during the year,—the first from the Ascension to Pentecost, the second during Advent,—ending by a complete abandonment of herself to the Divine Will, that the entire effect of the designs of

God on her soul from all eternity might be accomplished.

In spite of the obscurity in the first line of the following, might it not be the answer of St. Vincent to one or other of the writings we have just given? In the absence of proof we may conjecture. "It seems to me," he wrote to Louise, "that it will be quite enough to write in your tablet * the words of the original; place them in it, if you please. As for me, I shall keep in my heart the generous resolutions you have written me, to honor the adorable hidden life of our Lord, since He has given you this desire from your childhood. O my dear daughter, that thought savors of the inspiration of God. How far it is from flesh and blood! It is the state of soul necessary for a child of God."†

Mlle. Le Gras could not yet see the work which God had reserved for her. She aspired to great activity, to a more entirely devoted life. Her intercourse with St. Vincent, the contact with this heart so overflowing with charity, made her desire to associate herself with his work and devote herself entirely to the poor. But in what way she knew not; nor did her director, for he confined himself to advising her to pray, to consult God in Holy Communion, and to rely on His providence to do the rest.

* To explain this sentence M. Maynard supposes that she had made a summary of the sentiments of her act of consecration, to be kept before her eyes on a tablet.

† Letter of St. Vincent de Paul.

Their correspondence is full of this. Sometimes it is she who depicts the impatience of her soul, and her apprehensions for the future.* “Sometimes the days appear like months, in my good-for-nothing state,” she says. “I wish, however, to await tranquilly the hour marked by God, and acknowledge that my unworthiness keeps it back.” “Yes,” replies the Saint, “await in patience the evidences of His most holy will;” and taking up the thought of Louise on the mystery of Nazareth, her ordinary subject of prayer, he continues: “Always honor our Lord, in that He was unknown to be the Son of God. Rest in that thought; He demands this of you for the present and the future. Should His Divine Majesty show you what it is He requires of you, in such a manner as to make deception impossible, do not think about it, but let me know at once. I can do thinking enough for two.”† Many saints have counted among their most severe trials that obscurity of the soul in which they feel impelled to desire great service for God, yet must hold back for want of power to accomplish anything; seeking ever without finding; knocking and no door opened: like the dove which would fly but has no wings, or the traveller groping his way in the dark. For Mlle. Le Gras this delay was a kind of novitiate, which served to strengthen her courage. It lasted two years; but her perseverance at length triumphed over the wise

* June 7, 1627.

† Letter 117.

slowness of her guide, and she obtained his permission to help him in some of his labors. We find her, accordingly, assisting him as procuratrix on his apostolic journey, transmitting to him the offerings of those who were endeavoring to counteract the evil influence of some rich Huguenots in a village near Poissy.* In 1628 she was engaged in finding places for poor girls he had sent her from the country; and in 1629 she was actively employed under his direction in striving to extend the association known as "Confrérie de la Charité," which he had founded for the relief of the sick poor. This work was to imprint on the life of Mlle. Le Gras its definite direction, and give birth to the Company of Daughters of Charity; hence it merits a brief notice as to its origin and organization.

Vincent conceived the first idea of this work when on parish duty at Chatillon, two years previous. It is thus related by his faithful biographer Abelly: "One festival day," he says, "as Vincent ascended the pulpit to preach, he was stopped by a noble lady† who begged him to recommend to the charity of his people a family in extreme poverty and sickness who were living, or rather dying, about half a league distant. It pleased God to give such efficacy to his words that after the sermon a number of persons went out to visit this poor family, taking

* Verneuil (letter of St. Vincent, dated from that place, Oct. 8, 1627, and addressed to "Mlle. Le Gras, Rue Saint-Victor, Paris").

† Mme. de la Chassaigne.

bread, wine, meat, and other such necessities. After vespers Vincent took the road to the farm, accompanied by some of the parishioners, not knowing that others had gone before him, and was not a little surprised to meet many persons on the road returning from the poor family, several of whom were resting under the trees from the excessive heat. The words of the Gospel occurred to him, that these good people were like sheep without a shepherd. 'This,' he said to them, 'is a great charity, but it is not well regulated. These good people will have too many provisions at once, and part will spoil or waste, and they will be left as badly provided for as before.' This thought led him to confer with some of the most zealous ladies of his parish, on the days following, about the best means of permanently assisting this poor family and others who might be in like circumstances in the future. He drew up the plan of a rule which they should observe, and exhorted them to give themselves to God in order to put this rule in practice. He then chose some amongst them as officers, who were to meet him once a month and give him an account of what had transpired."

That work, so humble in its origin, so great in its consequences, seemed intended only for a small country town, but it extended to the neighboring towns; and Vincent, on his return to the Gondy family, hastened to establish it in Villepreux with the assistance of the Countess of Joigny, who wished to

take part in the work; also at Folleville,* Joigny,† Montmirail, and thirty parishes of l'Ile de France, in Champagne and at Picardy; that is to say, in all the territory dependent on the General of the Galleys.

The Confraternity was approved by the Archbishop of Lyons in 1617, by the Archbishop of Paris in 1618, and by the Bishop of Amiens in 1620.‡

The rules varied with local circumstances, but remained identical in their grand outline. A copy is furnished us in an unpublished note from the hand of

* Villepreux, a village of eight hundred inhabitants, now in the canton of Marly-le-Roi.

† Folleville, a village in the Department of the Somme, where we find a picturesque ruin of the castle of Gondy, also the church and even the pulpit in which St. Vincent used to preach.

‡ These Confraternities were not established without some opposition, if we may judge from the following which was recently published, and which we believe worthy of reproduction: "Plan of the requisition and suit of M. le Lieutenant de Beauvais against authorizing a company which M. Vincent wishes to establish in this place. Forasmuch as it has been ordained by the king's solicitors that it is strictly forbidden by royal ordinance and decree for any person to establish or direct any company or Confraternity in this kingdom without letters patent from his majesty; and whereas we have been advised that, notwithstanding this decree, for the past fifteen days in this city a certain priest named Vincent, setting aside all authority of the king, and without consulting the official authorities of this city, has assembled a number of women whom he persuaded to form into a Confraternity to which he gives the specious name of Charity,—the ostensible purport of said Confraternity being to relieve with food and other necessaries the sick poor in the city aforesaid of Beauvais; these women go, once in the week, in quest of money to aid in this project—that this should have been done by this said Vincent and said Confraternity, in which he has 300 women or thereabout, whom

Mlle. Le Gras preserved among her papers.* The end of the society and the duty of its members are contained in ten articles which we shall touch upon briefly.

The end for which the Confraternity is established the rule says, "is to assist the sick poor; spiritually, that those who die may leave the world in a good state, and that those who recover may take the resolution never more to offend God; and corporally, by administering medicines and nourishment; finally, to accomplish the ardent desire of our Saviour that we love one another. The patron of the Confraternity is our Saviour Jesus Christ, Charity itself." The Confraternity is to be composed of a certain number of women and girls, admitted with the consent of their husbands or parents, and called "Servants of

he often assembles for the exercises and functions herein explained—this is what we affirm should not be tolerated. In accordance with the edicts and decrees herein cited, it is required that this be inquired into and information provided. That such information be forwarded to the Procurator of the King. We have the honor to remain," etc.

The title of this document, "*Projet de requisitoire*," seems to indicate that the proceedings were commenced and not continued. (Feillet, "*La Misère au Temps de la Fronde*.")

* We find, also, in the letters of St. Vincent the rules of the Confraternity of Montreuil. Those of Chatillon, which comprise the details of the pious exercises given the associates, are quoted by Gossin. ("*Saint Vincent de Paul*, as seen in his Writings," 1834), and by Maynard "*Saint Vincent de Paul*," vol. 3). These rules were not ordinarily decreed until experience had proved what might be added and what retrenched. "Our Saviour," wrote St. Vincent, "gave the law of grace to man without having written it; let us do the same for some time." (Letter xcvi., addressed to Mlle. Le Gras.)

the Poor." A directress, who is to be chosen by themselves every two years, by a plurality of votes and with the approbation of the parish priest, shall decide on the sick who are to be admitted, and shall collect all the alms in a box with two keys, one of which she shall keep, the other shall be kept by one of her two assistants. The Servants of the Poor shall consider the sick as children whose mothers they have been constituted by God. They shall serve in turn, each one taking a day to carry the meat from the butcher and the bread from the baker, wine also from the hotel;* to prepare the dinner, and carry it to the sick at nine o'clock in the morning, doing the same for supper at five in the evening, and notifying the one who succeeds her on the next day both of the number and condition of the sick. Every day, morning and evening, they shall say a *Pater* and *Ave* for the growth and preservation of the Confraternity, and shall communicate when possible at the Mass said once a month for their Confraternity and their poor. Above all, they should cherish one another as sisters who make profession of honoring our Saviour in the virtue which He most constantly practised and most affectionately recommended—charity. To this end they shall visit and help one another sick or well, pray for one another, especially in times of sickness and of death, and do all in their power that each one leave this world in a good state.

* Each sick person was allowed a half-measure of wine, four or five ounces of meat or soup, two eggs, and bread at discretion.

Like those winged seeds of grain which are carried along by the wind, the Confraternity, or *Charity* as it was often called, had already taken root in many places far from its native soil, when St. Vincent, at the request of many charitable persons, established it in Paris in the parish of Saint Sauveur.* This was only a trial, and he was waiting to see the result, when Mlle. Le Gras, certain of the approbation of the priest of Saint Nicolas and expecting the help of five or six ladies in her neighborhood,† begged his permission to organize the Confraternity in the quarter where she lived. Unfortunately the details of this commencement have not come down to us; but from her correspondence with St. Vincent, who was then absent, we learn that this was the first work in which she took the initiative or depended on herself to put into execution. We cannot dwell upon the confraternities of Saint Eustache, Saint Benoit, and Saint Paul, to which she was doubtless no stranger; but we must notice here a modification, if not in the spirit of the work, at least in its mode of action, and one which, if secondary in appearance, was very considerable in reality.

The first associates were, as will be remembered, women and girls who, accustomed to labor from their childhood, found no difficulty in serving the sick with

* 1629.

† Among these probably was the daughter of a gentleman of Nivernais, Mlle. de Blosset. Later on she became the foundress of the "Filles de Sainte Geneviève."

their own hands. It could not be the same in Paris, where a number of ladies of rank wished to associate themselves with the Confraternity. How great soever their zeal, they could not descend to all the details of the rule ; for, admitting that they could brave the danger of contagion with the sick, how could they prepare a dinner with their own hands and carry it to the poor? On the other hand, to leave this to their servants was repugnant to their piety, as compromising the interests of the sick. St. Vincent understood the void and endeavored to fill it. He remembered to have met in the villages young girls who, having no inclination for marriage and no means to become religious, wished to devote themselves to good works, and he resolved that when he found others of that class he would send them to Paris and make use of them in serving the sick under the direction of the ladies who could not undertake this duty.

A young girl of Surrene was the first to offer—a chosen soul, whose simple, touching story we must relate.

Marguerite Naseau was a poor shepherdess whose constant dream, even before she could spell, was to teach little children. Her first pennies she gave for a primer, which she studied while watching her cows; and when she perceived a peasant whose appearance seemed to indicate that he could read, she ran to him with the request that he would tell her such a letter or such a word. Becoming mistress

in her turn, she hastened to communicate her knowledge to her companions. Soon she resolved to go from village to village to instruct children. Two or three of her pupils were gained over to the project, and they separated to go to different places, without money, without help, having for their only resource the zeal God had placed in their hearts. Marguerite told Mlle. Le Gras that often she passed days without a morsel of bread ; but she never lost courage, and in the end Providence always sent her, often on her return from church and without her knowing from whom they came, a store of provisions sufficient for a long time. Derided, calumniated even, by the villagers, who could not understand this kind of life, she was all the happier, and continued to employ her days in teaching the little ones she knew, and even found means from her poverty to pay for the education of young ecclesiastics, of whom several became fervent priests. One day she happened to meet Vincent de Paul, and learned from him of the existence of a Confraternity for the assistance of the poor sick. Although much attached to her modest duty of school-teaching, she saw in the other calling a more complete vocation, and joyfully offered her services to Mlle. Le Gras,* who sent her to the "Ladies of Charity" in the parish of Saint Sauveur. Other young girls soon followed her example, and

* Particulars of this "first Sister of Charity" are found in "Conferences ou Notices sur les Sœurs défunes," published in 1845 but not sold.

as they came they were sent to parishes where the Confraternity was organized.

Two or three young girls employed in carrying remedies or nourishment to the sick was not an institution, nor even the beginning of a distinct work, in the opinion of M. Vincent, who often repeated that neither he nor Mlle. Le Gras had the least idea of being the founder of anything. How astonished would both have been had they been permitted at that time to foresee the countless generations which were to issue from this humble cradle! But the most sublime productions have oftenest the most humble origin. God made the body of man from a little dust, and submitted all things here below to the law of germination. Man, history, society, unfold under the same law which rules the plant. First the bud, then the leaf, and finally the flower. We are now speaking of the germ of this society; twenty-five years later the branches had spread. The flowering was reserved to our time, under the form of twenty thousand Daughters of Charity scattered to-day over the two hemispheres.

CHAPTER V.

1629—1631.

St. Vincent sends Mlle. Le Gras to visit the Confraternities of the Province—Mlle. Pollalion—Pestilence in France—Death of Marguerite Naseau—Maternal Cares of Louise.

THE INTELLIGENT and devoted activity displayed by Louise in the establishment of "Charity" in Paris decided St. Vincent to confide to her at this epoch a more delicate and difficult mission. The provincial associations were multiplied everywhere; but with no common bond of union, and far from the superintendence of the founder, they needed in time the benefit of a common impulse, in order to attain the end of their calling. St. Vincent commissioned Mlle. Le Gras to visit them. "Go, Mademoiselle," he wrote to her; * "go in the name of our Lord. I pray His divine goodness to accompany you, to be your counsellor on the road, your shade in the heat, your shelter in rain and cold, your bed of rest when weary, your strength in toil, and to bring you back in perfect health and full of good works." This mark of confidence decided the future of Mlle. Le Gras. One more instance of that mysterious law which so frequently associates the heart of a woman with the

* May 12, 1629.

greatest foundations of the saints, and she becomes henceforth the helper of St. Vincent de Paul and mother to the poor—his children. Obeying with joy, she communicated, on the morning of her departure, in honor of the Charity of our Saviour and His journeys, so full of pain, labor, and fatigue, also to obtain grace to act in the same spirit with which He acted.* Then she set out, taking with her a supply of linen and remedies which she herself had bought, and furnished with letters of introduction and written directions from St. Vincent as to the different points to which he wished to call her attention.

Montmirail, in the diocese of Soissons, was the goal of this first visit, to which so many other apostolic journeys, if we may say so, were to succeed during the space of ten years. Everything leads us to believe that the traveller at first took the Champagne stage, which stopped at the Sign of the Cardinal, opposite Saint-Nicolas-des-Champs; but soon obliged to abandon that mode of travel, she shortened her distances, sometimes in rickety coaches, sometimes in carts, many times on foot, with short halts at the poor inns, "so as to take part in the misery of the poor."† It is probable that she was not alone; St. Vincent, no doubt, gave her as her companion one of the pious women who followed later in her journeys, and whose names we find

* Letter already quoted, 1629.

† Gobillon, p. 33.

in the Saint's letters. These are "good Mlle. Fay,* one in whom he had the greatest confidence;"† Mlle. de Villesien, whom he called his dear daughter;‡ Mlle. Dufresne, wife of one of his oldest friends,§ to whom he used to send kind messages of remembrance from these journeys of charity; Mlle. Pollalion, whom similarity of tastes as well as of trials had attached particularly to Louise. She had thought of entering the Convent of Capuchins in Rue Saint-Honoré; but her parents, on pretext of health, had persuaded her to give up that idea and marry Francis Pollalion, a resident of Raguse, in France. He died in Rome, a few years after their marriage. Being left a widow at the age of twenty-six, of rare beauty, and endowed with extraordinary intelligence, she delayed no longer at court, upon which she had shed an odor of virtue, and even, as we are told, of miracles, but devoted herself to good works under the direction of St. Vincent de Paul, who, having proved her spirit and the light God had given her, sent her with Mlle. Le Gras and some other ladies to visit the country missions and confraternities of

* Letter xi., Feb. 9, 1628.

† "My heart," wrote St. Vincent, proposes a project which it keeps secret. I must not reveal it to your heart, nor to Mlle. Fay's." (Letter xi.)

‡ Letter of St. Vincent to Mlle. Le Gras, Montmirail, Sept. 13, 1631.

§ M. Dufresne, secretary to Queen Marguerite, first wife of Henry IV., afterwards steward to M. de Gondy.

charity established in the provinces.* These two souls seemed made to understand each other. Mlle. Pollalion, ardent, enterprising, recoiling before no obstacle, equally capable of publicly slapping a woman for trying to pervert a young girl, and of dressing like a domestic to gain, by meekness, other women not less depraved, or becoming a peasant to instruct the ignorant villagers: such a one could not but gain by contact with Mlle. Le Gras, always so wise, so prudent and self-possessed. The latter could also learn from Mlle. Pollalion to crown the exactness and energy of her character with a decision and confidence less natural to her than to her friend.

We would like to know which of her companions accompanied Louise to Montmirail; but we are obliged to be content with the few facts which history has preserved. It was in this way that Mlle. Le Gras helped St. Vincent to pay the debt of gratitude contracted by the priests of the Mission towards the house of Gondy. The memory of the Countess of Joigny was in all hearts, as also the generous resolution of her husband, who had forsaken all his dignities and consecrated himself to God;† hence

* "Vie de la Vénérable Servante de Dieu, Marie Lumague, veuve de M. Pollalion, Institutrice des Filles de la Providence." Paris, chez Herissant, à la croix d'or et aux trois vertus. 1744.

† "The love of M. de Gondy for his wife," says the Abbé Housaye, "was that of one ever faithful to his vows." When left a widower he entered the Oratory, and there led a holy life, dying in 1662, aged 81 years. His life, written by P. Cloyseault, has been

Louise encountered no difficulty in the exercise of her zeal. She assembled the women of the Confraternity, instructed and encouraged them, endeavored to increase their number, instilled vigor into the practice of the rule; and that she might preach by example, she herself visited and served the sick, and in her own person revived the ministry and office of the widows of the first century, who were chosen to instruct the ignorant and rustic in language proportioned to their capacity, and teach them the Christian doctrine, as well as the obligations contracted by Christian baptism.

The first trial of a work so new to the time and country in which it was undertaken was fully justified by the result. The following year* Mlle. Le Gras again visited Saint Cloud,† where St. Vincent de Paul wrote to her, "I bless God that you have health for the sixty persons for whose salvation you are laboring" Villepreux, Villiers-le-Sec,‡ Liancourt and Bulle,§ where she taught the catechism to

published by P. Ingold in the first volume of the "Bibliothèque Oratorienne."

* February, 1630.

† The residence of Saint-Cloud, which, after being the theatre of brilliant entertainments given by Catherine de' Medici, was the scene of the assassination of Henry III. and the accession of Henry IV., was known at this time as the house of Gondy.

‡ Some one sent her a letter here from St. Vincent, dated Oct. 22, 1630.

§ Liancourt and Bulle, little villages of Beauvoisis, now in the canton of Clermont.

little girls and formed school-teachers. But in the endeavor to live and sleep like the poor people whom she visited * she overtaxed her strength and fell sick, as we learn by letters from St. Vincent. "Is not your heart well consoled," he writes to her, "to have been found worthy to suffer in serving God? Certainly you owe him a special thanksgiving for that."† And soon after he writes: "Blessed be God that you have recovered; but if you have any symptoms of a relapse, prevent it, if you please, and return. Take good care of your health, for the love of our Lord and His members, the poor. Guard well against trying to do too much.

"It is a ruse of the devil to incite good souls to do too much, so that they will not be able to do anything. The Spirit of God, on the contrary, incites us to do quietly the good we are able to do, so that we may persevere longer in doing it. That you may be fortified against all return to self, unite your heart to all the mockery, contempt, and bad treatment received by the Son of God. When you are esteemed and honored, be truly humbled in spirit and humiliated as much in honor as in contempt; do like the bee, which gathers honey from the dew on the wormwood as well as from that on the rose."

This last letter was addressed to Beauvais, where Mlle. Le Gras was enjoying most brilliant success.

* Letter of Mathurine Guérin to Marguerite Chétif, on the virtues of Mlle. Le Gras. (Arch. de la Mission.)

† Letter of St. Vincent, Oct. 22, 1630.

She visited eighteen confraternities of charity in Beauvais, for the bishop wished that every parish in his city and the neighborhood should have one of her confraternities.* She gave Conferences for the women, which were attended secretly by men also; † and they produced such a lively impression on the people that when she set out to return to Paris they accompanied her on the way and loaded her with blessings. God seemed to authorize these honors by a favor which the popular enthusiasm esteemed a miracle. A child, pressed by the crowd, fell under the carriage, and one of the wheels passed over its body. Attracted by the cry, Mlle. Le Gras invoked the name of God in her heart, and the child jumped up safe and sound. ‡ Was this fact supernatural, and what portion of it belonged to Louise? We cannot decide this question; moreover, the answer would do no good. "Charity," says St. John Chrysostom, "is a miracle, the most excellent of all miracles;" and this great Doctor adds: "The grace of miracles may be common to the just and to sinners, as there are robes common to the king and his subjects; but charity is the supreme gift; it is the privilege of saints, as the crown and sceptre are the ornaments reserved for kings, by which we recognize their dignity." Hence what we admire most in Mlle. Le Gras is this virtue by excellence, which, implanted in her soul by the Holy Spirit, and espe-

* At the house of M. du Rotoir at Beauvais, Dec. 7, 1630.

† Abelly, vol. i. p. 108.

‡ Gobillon, p. 43.

cially cultivated by her two directors, became more and more the seal of God on the soul of His servant.

The misfortunes of the time were also a rude apprenticeship for her. From the end of the year 1628 the plague was, so to speak, acclimated in France, and committing ravages there the actual extent of which we cannot give. The filthy condition of the streets, want of air, lack of science, absence of regular police, all contributed to increase the terror produced by the disease, the contagious character of which was greatly exaggerated. All obligations of friendship, the dearest ties of kindred, were forgotten in the presence of a malady which could be communicated by the touch, and exhaled from the breath of the plague-stricken patient, and by which everything he made use of was impregnated. The cities were deserted, and for months grass grew in the streets, and packs of wolves prowled about at night, attracted by the stench of the unburied dead. "Farmers themselves," says a historian of the time, "forsook the plough and threw down the axe." A year of plague brought a year of famine, which was in turn succeeded by another year of plague, a murderous cycle which continued to revolve for a long time.* In June 1631 the Hôtel Dieu of Paris contained constantly eighteen hundred sick, just four times as many as its resources permitted it to receive.† The "Charities" of the parishes redoubled

* M. Bougand, "*Histoire de Sainte Jeanne-Françoise de Chantal.*"

† M. Feillet, "*La Misère au Temps de la Fronde.*"

their efforts, Mlle. Le Gras, in particular, exposing her life in such a way as to elicit a burst of admiration from St. Vincent, familiar as he was with heroism. What a contrast, we may remark in passing, could we place side by side the courage of Louise de Marillac, attending the plague-stricken with her own hands, and the nervousness of some women of our day, forever taking precautions against bad air, and shutting off all intercourse with their friends for the slightest cold!*

The health of Mlle. Le Gras was not in the least affected, as St. Vincent had foretold with other things. "Fear not," he wrote to her; "our Lord wishes to make use of you in something tending to His glory, and I feel that He will preserve you for that work."†

Another victim, however, was selected from among the helpers of "Charity." To the first of

* The Marquis of Sablé and his friend the Countess of Maure, (Anne Doni d'Attichy, cousin of Mlle. Le Gras) went to such extremes as to furnish Mlle. Montpensier with special characters for her Romance, "The Princess of Paphlagonia." Hardly an hour passed that they were not considering the means of escaping death and prolonging life. Afraid of the air being too hot or too cold, or the wind too dry or too damp, or the weather not just the temperature to suit their health, they were writing to each other from different rooms. Voiture, on his part, wrote to Mme. de Sablé from a house where a person was sick: "I fear to frighten you too much; know then that I who write you do not write you, and that I have sent this letter twenty miles from here to be copied by a man whom I have never seen." (*Œuvres de Voiture*, vol. i. p. 29, Letter 14.)

† Letter cited by Gobillon, p. 37.

the humble girls who enrolled themselves for the service of the poor was decreed the honor of preceding her sisters to heaven. The harbinger of the work, she deserved to be its first fruit and its patron. *Ut nuntia operis ascenderet, et primitiæ et numen.** Her death was as simple as her life had been. For one year Marguerite Naseau had devoted herself to the sick in the parishes of Saint Sauveur, Saint-Nicolas-des-Champs and Saint Benoit,† where every one loved her because everything about her was lovable. One day she met a poor woman sick of the plague, took her home and cured her sickness. Immediately after, without anxiety, for she knew that God had called her, she bade adieu to her companions and went to the hospital of St. Louis, where she died towards the end of February 1631.

Mlle. Le Gras felt this loss keenly, and the Saint who wished to send her away as soon as he learned of Marguerite's illness now sent her to visit the Confraternities in the neighborhood of Senlis. Verneuil-sur-Oise, where she visited the house of a poor baker named Lacaille, was her first stopping-place. From there she went to Pont-Sainte-Maxence, where she tells us she lodged at the Sign of the Fleur-de-Lis; to Gournay, where the Confraternity women were coarser than elsewhere; to Neuville-le-Roy, and for

* Epitaph composed by Lacordaire on Brother Réquedat, his first Companion.

† Conférence de Saint Vincent du Janvier 22, 1645.

the second time to Bulle. At all these places she took exact account of the care bestowed on the sick by the members of the Confraternity, of their punctuality in attending their reunions and monthly Communions, of their intercourse with one another and with the people; and everywhere she left the rule in full vigor. She also examined minutely the accounts of offerings received at the houses, and the employment of reserve funds—which were devoted in some places to the purchase of land, elsewhere to that of sheep—the clothing and bedding lent to the poor; lastly, the registry kept of the names of those who left, and the reasons for their discharge. This we learn from notes left by her at the time of her visit.

The duties of Holy Week, 1631, recalled her to Paris, full of good works, after labors that God had blessed.* Her rest was of short duration, however, for in the first week of May we find her again at Villepreux, and at the end of the same month at Montreuil, in spite of the uncertain state of her health and her frequent attacks of illness—not of long duration fortunately. St. Vincent said, “I knew she was well before I knew she had been sick.” “May God strengthen you in such a way that it may be said of you, *Mulierem fortem quis inveniet*. You understand this Latin, so I shall not explain.” In September she set out again for Brie and Champagne, with

* Letter of St. Vincent, April 11, 1631.

Mlle. Dufresne and a country girl, to assist in the care of the sick and poor. St. Vincent laid out her route this time also, so that it would not coincide with that of the Mission Fathers, then engaged in the provinces, but he judged it no longer necessary to give her written instructions for the road. "The Spirit of our Lord will be her rule and director." * He confined himself to letters of introduction to the parish priests, for fear she might meet with obstacles from them. This danger was not encountered, however, for the lord of Gondy, seeing the great good she accomplished at Villepreux and Montmirail,† heartily desired this new journey into his estates, and went thither himself to receive her. "He wrote me," said the Saint, "the affection with which he received you." All was going on well at first. Young girls, encouraged to that life by their priests, came in crowds to be instructed by Mlle. Le Gras, and for two months she went through the country, establishing schools and visiting the Confraternities of Charity; when, all at once, the bishop of Chalons,‡ in whose diocese she was travelling, became alarmed at the unusual practices, and demanded an account. "If Mgr. de Chalons wishes it and he is near," wrote Vincent, "you would do well to see him and tell him quite simply what you are doing. Offer to retrench as much as he wants, or to leave it

* Letter, Sept. 1631.

† Letter to the curé of Bergier, 1631.

‡ Henri Clause de Fleuri, bishop of Chalons-sur-Marne, 1624-1640, whom St. Vincent called a holy person.

altogether if not agreeable to him : such is the spirit of God." *

The bishop, whose good intentions are beyond all doubt, could not understand the advantage of this new form of charity; and Mlle. Le Gras was obliged to return to Paris. The Saint congratulated her on this trial. "How happy you are," we read in his letter, "to be obliged, like the Son of God, to flee from a province where you were doing no harm, thank God!" † And, fearing that his daughter might impute to herself a defeat impossible to avoid, he adds: "I beg you not to imagine that this was your fault; no, it was not, but a pure dispensation of God for His glory and the greater good of your soul. The most elevating trait in the life of St. Louis is the tranquillity with which he returns from the Holy Land without having succeeded in his undertaking; and perhaps you will never meet with an occurrence redounding more to the glory of God than this one." "Our Saviour," he writes on another occasion, "will receive more glory from your submission than from all the good you could have done. One diamond is worth more than a mountain of stone: and one act of submission is more valuable than any number of good works." It was not without reason that St. Vincent insisted so much on this point, his object being to counteract a tendency of Mademoiselle to fret and accuse herself of not being faithful to interior grace in

* Letter 33.

† Letter addressed to Mlle. Le Gras at Mesnil, Oct. 31, 1631.

the discharge of exterior duties. Endowed with a clear, strong mind, a calm and correct judgment, ready to act as to suffer, her humility took alarm, and her first impulse was to attribute any want of success in the works of the Confraternity to her faults. Hence, for her. St. Vincent said, such vain apprehensions were more a hindrance than a benefit to her salvation, and he sought to dissipate them by recommending the holy joy which produces confidence in God. "Honor the holy cheerfulness of our Lord and His Blessed Mother." * "Be cheerful above everything," he often wrote. "Leave aside that fear (which appears to me somewhat servile) to those whom God has not gifted as He has you; despise those thoughts which seem to weaken the faith God has given you; despise still more their author, who has no power over you but what you choose to give him: but banish the idea that you have ever given him any power. Your tears and sorrow are so many proofs of what I say; be, then, in peace." †

This disposition of Louise to exaggerate her obligations was especially manifest when there was question of her son. He was pursuing his studies in a safe place not far from her; nevertheless his moral and physical culture gave her so much anxiety that St. Vincent obliged her to moderate it. This was the "only side of her that remained a woman;" ‡ and for this she was more to be praised than blamed,

* Letter 52.

† Letter 37.

‡ Letter 71.

when we remember that she was still in the world and a widow, whose first duty was the education of her only son. Always ready, nevertheless, to banish the least imperfection from a soul whose exquisite purity he was one day to proclaim, St. Vincent wrote to her: "What must I say of this too great tenderness? Certainly it appears to me that you ought to labor to rid yourself of it. It only troubles your mind, and deprives you of the peace our Lord desires to find in your heart. God wills you to be occupied, not exclusively, but sweetly, and gives you as your model the worthy Mother de Chantal. May He give you a share in the generosity He granted to that holy soul in like circumstances!"* Knowing, also, that "never was mother more motherly" than she was, St. Vincent was eager to send her news of her son when she was absent; and this he did in such minute detail that we might be tempted to say of him that never was father more watchful and tender than he. "This will serve to assure you that your son is quite well." "Be not uneasy; we take good care of him." "I shall see him. But be in peace, I beg you; he is under the special protection of our Lord and His Blessed Mother, on account of the gifts and offerings you have made for him. . . His mind seems to expand more and more. . . he is cheerful and very good, edifying every one. . . If it continues, you will have reason to praise God and hope to be consoled in him."† We

* Letter 80.

† Letters of Oct. 22, 1630; Sept. 2-17, Oct. 17, 1631.

might multiply quotations; but we shall never find her maternal affection making her recoil from duty or danger. Hence there was nothing selfish in it; and if it was an occasion of long and bitter sufferings to her poor heart, it was because sorrow and love are never long separated here below.

CHAPTER VI.

1632—1634.

Fortunes and Disgrace of the Uncles of Louise—The Marshal de Marillac dies on the Scaffold, and the Chancellor in Prison—Mlle Le Gras does not allow herself to be cast down by these Afflictions, but courageously pursues the Path of Good Works—She receives at her House the first Daughters of Charity—Her Vow to consecrate herself with them—First Conference by St. Vincent de Paul.

DIVINE PROVIDENCE, in taking entire possession of Louise, had destroyed none of her affection. Her heart was one of those which acquired without losing; and if the poor found a privileged circle around her, her own family remained as dear to her as ever. The honors acquired by M. Michel de Marillac had not elated her, earthly greatness had no attraction for her; and we would not remark it here, were there question of court favor or military distinction only; but glory gave place to trial, and Louise, more than any one else, was to feel the reaction in the persecution of her uncles. The part she took in their afflictions obliges us to glance at a few points of a history whose most interesting details have never been published, and which nevertheless abounds in hard lessons.

The two living representatives of the Marillac family whose destiny and relationship so often brought

them together were at first raised to the highest dignities through the protection of the Queen-Mother, to whom one of them was related by marriage. The elder, Michel, appointed Superintendent of Finance in 1624, became Keeper of the Seals two years afterwards; but his great soul was not in the least perturbed by the fascination of this office. "I have a great mind to leave my commission on the table to be revered," he said, "for it is to it, and not to me, that all this honor is paid."

Louis XIII., on the contrary, would wish to have had his council made up of Marillacs, and took pleasure in repeating: "This is between us for life and death; if he were in the Indies, I would send for him." Shortly after he brought him to the siege of La Rochelle, where Louis de Marillac, the field-marshal, was directing the works of the fortification. The operation was tedious, and, notwithstanding the strict discipline of the soldiers, the perseverance of the leaders appeared feeble before the resistance of the besieged. Michel, convinced more than any one else of the necessity of conquering, used all the means furnished by his position and intelligence to keep up their spirits, while in secret he sought the assistance of Heaven; making a vow, as was known afterwards, to communicate every day until the place surrendered, and to found in perpetuity three Masses every month in the chapel of the Carmelites in the Faubourg Saint-Jacques. After having the trouble, he had the honor; for when the inhabitants

came, not to throw themselves, as the Keeper of the Seals said, but to fall, in spite of themselves, at the king's feet, it was he who read the written decree of the conquest, to which Louis de Marillac signed his name, the king not wishing to give his signature in a convention of his subjects. The year following the two brothers met again with Louis XIII. in Languedoc, the one endeavoring to convert the Huguenots by peaceful means, the other to check their revolt by force of arms. At last the capture of Privas, in May 1629, gained for Louis the bâton of Marshal of France. The zenith of glory was now reached by this family with whom everything had prospered hitherto; but fidelity to the Queen-Mother was soon to bring about its irretrievable ruin.

The dissension between the Cardinal and Marie de' Medicis, which had been existing for some time, was every day becoming more marked, and Louis XIII. falling sick at Lyons, the Queen solicited and obtained from him the promise to banish his too-powerful minister. Some weeks after she called on him to fulfil his promise, and proposed Michel and Louis de Marillac as prime-ministers. We need not repeat the events which followed, nor their well-known result, as they are matter of history. November 11, 1630, at the conclusion of a stormy scene, the king left abruptly for Versailles, and the Keeper of the Seals followed in the same direction. The Court believed that the Cardinal was lost; but while they were hastening to the palace at

Luxembourg, where Marie de' Medicis was already rejoicing in victory, Richelieu rejoined the king, and regained a mastery over him which he ever afterward held. The Luxembourg was at once deserted, and the French, ever ready to mock at want of success, called that day the "Day of Dupes "

But dupes alone would not suffice for that day it must also have its victim. At a short distance from Versailles, in the château Glatigny, M. de Marillac calmly awaited the disgrace he had predicted when he left Paris, adding to his prediction of this downfall: "I did nothing to obtain the seals; I shall do nothing to keep them." He had written to the king, reminding him of, and renewing, his former request to be released from the charge, and, without a fear for his future, was hearing the Mass celebrated by his almoner, when, at these words of the Epistle, "*Communicantes Christi passionibus gaudete*",—"If you partake of the sufferings of Christ, rejoice—" * when the door opened and the Lord of Ville-aux-Clercs, secretary to his Majesty, entered and made a sign that he wished to speak with M. de Marillac. After the Mass, the royal emissary politely informed M. de Marillac that he was commissioned to demand the seals, and to inform him that an officer of the body-guard was waiting with eight archers to conduct him to a place named by the king, signifying to him at the same time to dismiss his attendants and

* I Peter. iv. 13.

take a carriage which was ready to convey him to his unknown destination. The carriage drove off, and continued on the road all day until evening without stopping. The prisoner, calm and as if relieved of a great burden, chatted gayly with the companions of his journey, the many objects which they passed on the road suggesting to him amusing or edifying stories which he related, and making his almoner catechise the archers. He was taken in this way to Evreux, Lisieux, Caen, and then back to Lisieux, where he remained for six weeks in solitary confinement, so absolute that even the butter-pots of the merchants passing through the place were examined to make sure that no letters were written or sent ; and when he attended Mass, it was with an escort of armed carbineers, as if he were a great criminal. The people declared it a shame to see a good old man treated in that way ; but he replied that " his duty to God was to accept peacefully and tranquilly everything that might happen to him."

This serenity never forsook him ; and when permitted to correspond with his family, he wrote : " I wish I could obtain for you a share of the graces that God has sent me in this affliction ; they are very great ; if you knew them, you would have more trouble to moderate your joy than you now have to control your sorrow." And a short time after : " I am so well satisfied with everything, without exception, that has happened, that I can never repeat often enough, ' I wish all my friends could know my happiness.' " And final-

ly—alluding to the sweetness which God lavished on him daily—he wrote: “A little glimpse of the delights of heaven is more than sufficient to help us not only to bear patiently all the afflictions of this life, but to make us forget them altogether.”

His enemies could not read the depths of that great soul like his friends; yet what pretext for calumny could they find in the life of M. de Marillac? Richelieu himself gives credit to his strict integrity, inflexible courage, purity of life and manners; and he confesses to Father Joseph, his confidant, that he would willingly sacrifice an arm to recover a friendship of such use to him in affairs of state.* He was a sage† and a Saint in the world which heaped honors upon him without his solicitation or attention to them. In the administration of state affairs he remained poor, faithful to a vow never to become rich even justly and lawfully; but he gave away almost all that he possessed.‡ Hence Condé applied to him with truth these words of Scripture: “Innocent in hands and clean of heart.”§ His friends amused themselves by applying to him his own expression

* Lefèvre de Lézeau, “Histoire de Michel de Marillac.” (Bibl. Sainte-Genéviève, MSS.) From this manuscript we have taken the greater part of the details of circumstances preceding and following the captivity and death of M. de Marillac. Most of them are unpublished.

† M. l'Abbé Houssaye, “Le Cardinal de Bérulle et les Carmelites.”

‡ See his epitaph, composed by Mother Madeleine of St. Joseph. He left scarcely enough to defray his funeral expenses.

§ Ps. xxiii. 4.

in reference to the disgrace of a celebrated religious :
“ He will feel it no more than the swan coming from
the water with his feathers scarcely damp.”

But if there were no pretext for attacking Michel de Marillac, we must not forget that he was brother to the Marshal, Louis de Marillac, who was then in Piedmont sharing the command of the French army with the Marshals Force and Schomberg, and was suspected of taking part in the plots which were forming against the Ministry. An order was sent, in consequence, from the king to Schomberg to arrest his colleague and send him under a strong guard to France. The three Marshals lived together in Foglizzo, where the king's mandate found them. Each Marshal took his turn to command. This day it happened that Marillac was on duty, which circumstance prevented the king's letter from being opened in his presence, as there was no suspicion of its contents—following so closely, as it did, on the compliments* addressed by the king to Louis de Marillac on account of his military exploits. The troops who had followed him from the heart of Champagne, and whose officers were all devoted to him, comprised more than half the entire army; therefore the greatest caution was necessary in executing the king's order. The Marshal

* One day, hearing that the Spaniards were to attack a certain place, he gave them to understand that he would remain where he was for twenty-four hours; at the end of that time he wrote in the registry of the neighboring city that the French had waited all day for the enemy.

made no resistance, however, and nobly protested his fidelity to the Queen-Mother, without hiding the fact that this was the cause of his misfortune.* After fifteen days' confinement in his own apartments he was brought back to his old place of command and imprisoned in Sainte-Menehould. From there he was conducted to Verdun, and tried for misdemeanors and depredations committed by him when general of the army in Champagne.

Could his conduct be called in question? While serving the king with loyalty had he profited of the occasion to reap pecuniary advantage? Had he, as was said, spared the charges on certain villages, and then received a tribute from them for so doing? By all accounts such things were done so frequently as to be almost tolerated; but to his last breath he denied it, and we can scarcely imagine that the Governor of Champagne would have been placed at the head of the army in Piedmont had his conduct been publicly scandalous.

Much more evident than his shortcomings was the hatred which pursued him and which set aside every form of justice. Twice the Marshal declined the services of the extraordinary commission appointed by the king, and begged to be brought before his constitutional judges; twice the Parliament of Paris granted his appeal to its jurisdiction; but the king deposed the Attorney-General, Molé, who made the decision, and annulled the decree.

* Bazin, " Histoire de Louis XIII."

To these violent measures was joined unaccustomed rigor, and several times, by the king's advice, the accused was refused the right to justify himself. His niece and grand-nephews were ordered to leave Paris,* where his papers were being examined, and Madame de Marillac, relative of the Queen-Mother† as we have said, was forbidden to intercede in behalf of her husband—a proceeding never known before, the Marshal remarked, not even in the crime of treason. The Cardinal refused an audience to the unfortunate lady, and on leaving his palace she was arrested by the archers and conducted outside of Paris. Losing all her strength with the loss of her hopes, she fell sick in the village of Roule, near the capital. “The good lady of the Marshal is very sick; let us offer her sorrow to God; would she not be very happy to leave this world of misery?” Thus wrote St. Vincent‡ to Mlle. Le Gras, then at Montmirail, in the province of Champagne, the theatre of such stirring events. Four days after, on the 17th of September,§ he told her the news he had led her to expect: “Madame la Maréchale is gone to receive in heaven the recompense of her labors;” and foreseeing what this separation would cost the heart of Louise, he justifies her sorrow in advance by the

* March 6, 1631.

† Catherine, a daughter of Cosmé de' Medicis and aunt of the queen, married M. de Marillac December 20, 1607.

‡ Letter dated Sept. 13, 1631.

§ Letter 34.

most sublime example : " Why should you not weep ? The Son of God wept for Lazarus."

A letter found among the papers of Mlle. Le Gras shows the affectionate nature of their intercourse, and gives us to understand the sorrow with which this event must have overwhelmed her.* Alas ! the news awaiting her in Paris was not such as would dry her tears. The commission at Verdun being too slow, another was appointed, many of whose members were known to be the enemies of the Marshal. They were to meet this time at Pontoise ; but, under pretext that the city was subject to military jurisdiction, the tribunal was transferred to Ruel, in the house, and one might say in the hands, of the Cardinal himself. The judges, who pretended not to be free at Pontoise, were very accommodating here. In four sittings they heard the explanations of the accused. When every incident had been exhaustively discussed, he was declared guilty by unanimous consent ; but when the penalty came up for decision, there was dissension among the members. Of the twenty-four composing the commission, a majority of one voice pronounced the penalty of death.

What avail were the friends of M. de Marillac

* This letter on the subject of a good work ends thus : " Do me always the favor to love me as I love you, and beg God to console me in the afflictions I shall meet with if this war breaks out. I wish you a happy New Year, and am,

" In affection, yours,

DE' MEDICIS."

an opposition to the implacable will which directed every circumstance in the details of this cruel affair? Anne d'Attichy, his niece, was related to the Cardinal through Madame Combalet, and, like her, was a maid of honor to the Queen-Mother; but the Cardinal would not admit of family intervention in political affairs. His other friends vainly solicited mercy for the condemned; they were referred to the king, who was inflexible. The reason of this severity was said to be the menacing tone assumed by the Queen-Mother in favor of one of her most devoted servants.

Two days after the Marshal was escorted from Ruel to the Hôtel de Ville in Paris, and there told his fate. The "Chambre de Deuil" was assigned him, with two Capuchins, and two Feuillans, to prepare him for death. He was then conducted to the scaffold, which had been erected in the Place de Grève. It was six feet high. After half an hour given him for prayer, the Master of the Rolls read aloud the sentence. At the words "embezzling," "extortion," Marillac exclaimed in a loud voice, "It is false!" And when he heard that the sum of one hundred thousand crowns was to be paid from his estate as restitution, he added, "My estate is worth nothing."* The people were deeply moved

* It is said that when Condé saw the miserable half-built country house which was made a pretext for the destruction of the Marshal, he exclaimed, "There is not enough in that to excuse the whipping of a page."

at the sight of this old warrior with his hands manacled. The captain of the watch could not forbear to express his indignation and sympathy; but Marillac answered him, "Grieve not for me, sir, but for the king." At length the executioner begged pardon for the part he was obliged to take in the tragedy, and with one stroke of the huge sword struck off the head of Louis de Marillac. A carriage draped in mourning was stationed at the foot of the scaffold to receive his body, which was conveyed to the house of Mme. de Marillac, his sister-in-law, in the Rue Chapon, where the members of his family were assembled. "With sorrow and sighs," says an author of the time,* "they bore him to a large hall in which a beautiful chapel had been prepared to receive him. Amid this sorrow-stricken group Mlle. Le Gras found her place. Her duty needed all her tact on this occasion, for many heart-wounds were there to be healed, and many fierce resentments to be overcome by charity.† She communicated

* "Récit véritable de tout ce qui s'est passé à la mort de Mgr. le Maréchal de Marillac." The body of the Marshal was interred beside that of his wife in the church of the Feuillans, in the Rue Sainte-Honoré. His bust, with this inscription, marks the place: "Sorte funesta clarus."

† Mme. de Combalet having sent to inquire for Mlle. d'Attichy, and expressing regret at not seeing her, the latter replied that she did not wish to meet the niece of her uncle's murderer. She declared her eternal hatred to the Cardinal. In 1637 she became Countess of Maure by her marriage with Henri, brother of the Duke de Mortemart. She did all she could, also her husband, for the restoration

all her sad news to St. Vincent de Paul. The greatest consolation the Saint could offer her was taken from the Christian sentiments of the Marshal. 'He had honored the sufferings of the Son of God by uniting thereto his own.' 'Not doubting his salvation,' he adds, 'let us not pity him. . . . What matter to us how our relatives go to God, if they only go to Him?' " *

But Louise was not at the end of her sufferings, and all her anxiety now was for the former Keeper of the Seals, her favorite uncle. The way by which he was going to God was that of captivity. His confinement had become more strict since the escape of Marie de' Medicis. He was brought from Lisieux to Châteaudun, where his daughter-in-law, exiled from Paris, joined him. He divided between prayer and labor a life in which no bitter memories,† no regrets, found place. He felt himself at the port of that blessed liberty to which he had never ceased to aspire, and his every thought was of heaven. He compiled a new edition of "The Imitation of Christ," ‡ a trans-

of the Marshal. ("Mme. la Comtesse de Maure, sa Vie et sa Correspondance," par Ed. de Barthélemy. Paris, 1863.)

* Letter xlv.

† Never did he permit a word to be spoken in his presence against the Cardinal de Richelieu, nor against the judges who had condemned his brother.

‡ This edition appeared in 1631. The frontispiece of it was a picture of M. de Marillac receiving Holy Communion in a chapel, probably that of the Countess of Dunois at Châteaudun. He appears between two persons, one of whom is believed to represent his

lation of the Psalms and the Book of Job, while at the same time he was composing a Treatise on Eternal Life. He was, moreover, occupied with the beatification of Mother Marie of the Incarnation, having petitioned the Holy See for this process to be commenced when, as Keeper of the Seals, he was in authority. These were, as he wrote to his friend and biographer, Lefèvre, his affairs of state—state affairs truly important and glorious, treating of eternal crowns and thrones, and not like the petty trifles, quarrels, and dissensions of this lower world.

Louise had no means to follow the promptings of her heart which urged her to visit and console her uncle, being without a friend at court except the persons now in disgrace, such as Mlle. d'Attichy and Nicolas Le Gras, who had succeeded Antoine in the office of secretary to the Queen-Mother. We have an intimation of her project in regard to her uncle in a letter from St. Vincent, in which he approves without mentioning her design. This letter corresponds in date with a refusal of the jailors of Chateaudun to admit a lady from Paris. All that remained for Louise was to suffer and pray. She went to the Hôtel-Dieu, where she surpassed herself in attend-

brother, the Marshal. The other is a lady, and can be none else than the sharer of his captivity, Mme. de Marillac, his daughter-in-law. There is no authority for supposing, as some do, that the artist wished to represent Mlle. Le Gras.

ing the sick,* and then to the great convent in the Rue St. Jacques, where Mother Madeleine had the Blessed Sacrament exposed for sixty days and as many nights for this benefactress of her community. Not less devoted than Louise to M. de Marillac, this holy prioress used every effort to encourage and support him. She wrote to him frequently, and had persons to intercede in his behalf with Richelieu, that the severe rigor of his captivity might be mitigated. Alas! all she obtained was that, after death, his body might be secretly conveyed from Châteaudun to Carmel, and a tomb, with any inscription she pleased, erected for him beside that of his son in the chapel which he had founded in honor of St. Joseph.

If the grief of Mlle. Le Gras at the death of her uncle could have been assuaged, it surely might have been by the details of his death which Mme. de Marillac hastened to send her. His end was at once simple and sublime. He departed in the full use of his faculties, and with a serenity of soul worthy of a saint. When the physician told him that his last hour had come, he exclaimed: "God be praised! You could tell me no better news. I am ready; and, since there is no time to lose, let us be doing." Calmly then, and without the least eagerness, as if preparing for an ordinary journey, he asked for a table and inkstand and a light. He read

* Letter of the Saint, June 1632.

over his will, sent for his daughter-in-law, bade the children, if they loved him, not to cry, and received Extreme Unction, answering the prayers of the Church himself. "*Jam non sum ex hoc mundo*," he said to those around him, "*Vado ad Patrem*." "Yes, my God, Thou callest me, and I come to Thee." Still, he wished to labor for God's glory to his last breath. Seated by the side of his bed, dressed, as usual, in his little fur collar and violet-colored satin cap, he took up his "Treatise on Eternal Life," and began again his writing. After some time, he stopped and said, without any apparent emotion, "My sight is going; I see double writing;" but he resumed his pen. At length, laying it aside, he said again, "I can scarcely see—scarcely distinguish your faces." He thanked God for having heard his prayer in leaving him his senses to the last; and without movement, without agony, he died in a sitting posture, praying to his last breath. This was between seven and eight o'clock on the morning of August 7, 1632. Some hours after, while eager crowds were pressing around and touching his body with objects of devotion, a great light appeared in the sky, as if a flaming torch were carried slowly across the heavens illuming the earth. Four daughters of St. Teresa, distant from each other, saw this light at the same time. One of the nuns said that it impressed her with the idea that some great personage was leaving this world. This religious was no other than Marie

of the Blessed Sacrament, daughter of M. de Marillac.*

In the midst of these cruel trials, and without any neglect of duty on account of them, Mlle. Le Gras continued with admirable courage the lowly labors which charity had induced her to undertake. Part of the year had been spent in visiting the confraternities at a distance from Paris. She had visited in succession Ville-neuve-Saint-Georges† (where she had heard of some carelessness in the service of the sick), Limours, Saint-Denis, Crosne (a little village related to Villepreux, as the port St. Victor is to Notre Dame).‡ Sometimes she travelled alone, and on horseback when she could procure a horse; at other times she made use of Mme. Pollalion's carriage; again, it was with a new companion, Madame Goussault, whose acquaintance we shall shortly make. She left school-teachers in several of the places which she visited; others, again, gave her an opportunity to recruit her forces by furnishing her with humble laborious servants of the poor. With the increase of numbers, however, the defects of the organization were more apparent. These young girls were often sent to the parishes just after leaving their own villages, and with little experience in nursing the sick; deficient, also, in other qualifications necessary for such duties. It is true that they received a short training from Mlle. Le Gras; but without much previous instruction in

* Lefèvre, "Histoire de Michel de Marillac."

† She was there in July, 1632. Letter 50.

‡ Letter 50.

ordinary piety, with no superior to watch over their conduct, and no common bond of union among themselves, nor other rule of direction than the words of Mlle. Le Gras or St. Vincent, and, finally, without any engagement to protect them from their own inconstancy, it was not surprising if they could not always please the Ladies of Charity. Nevertheless the ladies had to bear with them, since even with their assistance it was difficult to supply the numerous demands for help. St. Vincent had for some time cherished the thought of forming a kind of Novitiate, where these young girls could learn the practice of a Christian charitable life before being sent to nurse the sick or to serve the poor; and he mentioned it to Mlle. Le Gras, who immediately offered herself for the work. Although secretly rejoicing in her good will to be whatever Providence willed her to be, St. Vincent at first desired her to wait, as he was always afraid of anticipating the time marked by God. "Saul," he said, "was looking for his asses when he found a kingdom; St. Louis, striving to conquer the Holy Land, gained the kingdom of heaven; and you, in seeking to become the Servant of these poor girls, become the servant of the Lord." At length, in the autumn of 1633, he decided to make the attempt, and chose three or four from a number of aspirants. Mlle. Le Gras received them into her house on the eve of St. Andrew's, Nov. 29. This little snow-ball, as he called it, was not long increasing: other young girls

and some widows presented themselves.* At the end of a few months the house was a true Novitiate, where the cross, as Louise said, formed the only cloister.

The will of God manifested itself in the success of the enterprise, and the interior peace experienced by Mlle. Le Gras, her love for her duty increasing more and more, seemed also the sign of her vocation. This voice which cannot deceive was what St. Vincent wished her to await; hence he now permitted her to consecrate herself entirely to their common labor by an irrevocable vow, pronounced March 25, 1634.† She renewed at the same time her vow of chastity, and made the resolution to communicate the 25th of every month, to thank God for her vocation to a state whose difficulties had not abated her courage—a state essentially perfect and which corresponded to the attractions of her whole life. There were trials and difficulties, however, which would have made a less courageous soul recoil. To receive under her roof, and to live with them from morning till night, persons until then unknown to her, most of them from the common classes of society, virtuous of course, but without education, and often rude in their manners and language—this for a lady of rank, refinement,

* Widows were admitted when not encumbered by a family. The names of Mme. Pelletier and Mme. Turgis often occur in St. Vincent's letters at this time. Later on the latter is styled *Sœur Turgis*.

† This date has been religiously preserved by the community of the Daughters of Charity. The 25th of March is fixed for renewal of vows.

and intelligence, who loved the poor above everything, but who had been accustomed from childhood to refined society—this, we say, was a sacrifice all the more complete as it was unnoticed by those who were its object. Many postulants presented themselves, as we have said, but most of them left after a short time.

“I have often heard her say,” wrote one of these girls afterwards, “that it annoyed her very much to look at so many strange faces;” yet this annoyance was almost continual, as she believed herself obliged to receive all who presented themselves with seeming good will; and to make room for them she renounced the convenience of keeping her own maid, and was attended in her household duties and around her own person by one of the new-comers—“by the least stylish,” remarked the same writer. She shared her room, and even went so far as to share her bed, with one who was afflicted with a painful infirmity.* Her apartment, like her revenue, was quite limited. It may be seen to this day, for the house is still standing which tradition points out as having been the scene of these beginnings, and of which she occupied, probably, but one story. A low door and dark hall give entrance to this little house, with its two small windows in front: such is the Bethlehem of the Daughters of Charity.†

* Letter of Sister Mathurine Guérin to Sister Marguerite Chetif.

† This house, situated in the street then known as Fossés-Saint-Victor, but now called after Cardinal Lemoine, is No. 43, and is occupied as a stationer's store.

No positive rule was yet in practice amongst them; and as order is impossible to any association without a common rule, Louise was obliged to draw up a sketch of the regulations to be observed by her Daughters. St. Vincent was sick; therefore she could not consult him before commencing her task, and he was glad of it. "God wills it," he said, "so that I may not put my scythe into your harvest." At the same time, when the affair was presented to him, he thought it his duty to make some modifications. He advanced the hour of rising and retiring, ordained silence from evening prayers until after the prayer of next day, and decided that communion should be received on Sundays and feast days. As soon as he felt better, he called the girls together and explained what he expected from them; and there, on the 31st of July, 1634, in the presence of Mlle. Le Gras, Sister Marie, from Saint Sauveur parish, Srs. Michel and Barbara, attached to St. Nicolas, Sr. Marguerite, one of St. Paul's, and Sr. Jane, "alone with her angel," in St. Benedict's, he inaugurated that admirable series of Conferences which, after two centuries and a half, remain the most precious treasure of the Daughters of Charity. Collected from memory by the Sisters, or often made up from notes taken by Mlle. Le Gras while St. Vincent was speaking, they preserve an aroma of simplicity the charm of which is unequalled.

In these Conferences we may hear St. Vincent speak with all the freedom of a father in the midst of his

children, with the sweet dignity of a saint, surrounded by souls he was shaping and directing. He proposes questions; they respond: and the light of sublime truth often shines through the artless expression of their thoughts. The Father approves their responses or comments on them, and makes use of them in developing his sense of the subject under discussion.

The Saviour doubtless acted thus with His disciples: and this thought was one presented to the mind of St. Vincent at the first time of his speaking in this little *Cænaculum*. "Divine Providence, my daughters," he said to them, "has assembled you here that you should honor the human life of our Lord Jesus Christ on earth." He then showed that our Saviour was amongst them in virtue of His promise to be with those who were assembled in His name; and with those, above all, who united in spirit for the purpose of serving Him. "You have not yet had any rule. In this Divine Providence has treated you like the chosen people, who, after the creation, were more than a thousand years without any law. Our Saviour, also, did the same to His primitive Church; for while He was on earth there was no written law, and it was His Apostles after His death who collected His teaching and ordinances. In the same way, I could not hitherto resolve to have the rule of your house reduced to writing. But while waiting until it pleased the will of God for this to be done, behold how you should pass the twenty-four hours composing your

day, then your week, your year, thus conducting you to a blessed eternity."

He enumerated then, as they occurred to him, the divers points to which he wished to call attention, commencing by the principal action of the day. First. "To rise at 4 o'clock; as often as their duties of charity permitted them, to retire at 9, because they must preserve themselves for the service of the poor." In the morning to offer up all their thoughts, words, and actions to God, with every movement of their heart; all the actions of the day drawing their merit from this offering. "This is why the Devil tries his utmost to turn our thoughts from God when we awake."

Secondly—prayer. "O my daughters," he exclaimed, "this is the centre of devotion. God gives us a deluge of good thoughts in prayer. Gather carefully these graces and put them in practice, and you will give joy to the heart of God. Do not believe that poor girls, ignorant as you suppose yourselves, should not pretend to meditation. Oh, God is so good! and among the proofs of His goodness which He has given you, remember that of calling you to the exercise of charity. After that, how could you think that He would refuse you the grace necessary to pray? O my daughters, such a thought should never enter your mind. I was much edified to-day in speaking to a poor girl, like you, but who has become one of the greatest souls I know, simply by her assiduity in prayer."

Thirdly—"Be careful to render an account of your prayer afterwards; say simply to one another the good thoughts God has given you."

Fourthly—"Go every day to Mass; but assist at it with great devotion. What do you think you do when you assist at Mass? It is not only the priest who offers the holy sacrifice, but all who assist at it offer it also."

Fifthly—"When you leave your prayer or Mass for the service of the poor, you should know, my daughters, that you lose nothing, for the service of the poor brings you nearer to God. Be careful, then, to give them all the help they need, especially spiritual help. Bear with their humors, and never be angry or speak harshly to them. Ah, they have enough to bear without that. Think, on the contrary, that you are their visible guardian angel, their father and mother, and never contradict them, except in what would be hurtful to grant; for then to yield to them would be cruel. Weep with them, for God has established you to be their consolation."

Sixthly—"The time remaining after the service of the sick should be well employed; never remain idle. Apply yourselves to learn to read, so as to be able to instruct little girls in the places where you may be employed. Ah! how do you know what Providence may have in store for you? Hold yourselves, then, always ready to go wherever obedience may call you, without imitating the sons of Zebedee, who asked underhand for the places they desired, and which, for their good. God would not grant."

After other advice on divers subjects, the Saint returns to their fundamental virtue and continues: "As obedience perfects all our works, it will be necessary for you that one hold the place of Superior; sometimes it will be one, sometimes another; and having chosen the one who is Superior for the month, look on her as you would on the Blessed Virgin Herself. I may here relate something concerning myself. When God placed me in the house of Mme. de Gondy, I proposed to regard her and obey her as I would the Blessed Virgin, and God knows how much benefit I derived from this practice. Always honor the Ladies of Charity, and comport yourselves in their presence with much respect. Honor also the sick; look on them as your masters."

He then set forth the advantages which the Daughters of Charity would derive from their manner of life. First, he said, "If any one in the world can hope for paradise, it is you. Why? Because in observing your manner of life you are sure of doing the will of God. The second advantage is the commencement of a great good which may last forever. Yes, my daughters, if you enter on the practice of your rule with the design of doing the holy will of God, there is room to hope that your little community will endure, increase, continue the same good after your death, and be the subject of increase for your glory in heaven."

After having explained the different means they should take to persevere, "Have courage, my daugh-

ters," the Saint exclaimed in concluding, "and consider what mercy God has shown in choosing you to be the first to establish this company. When Solomon wanted to build a temple to God he used precious stones for the foundation, to show that what he intended to build was to be very perfect. The goodness of God wishes to do you the same favor—you who are the foundation of this company; namely, to make you eminent in virtue. I am sure you would not wish to do wrong to those who will come after you; and as trees bear fruit according to their kind, we may suppose that those who follow you will not pretend to greater virtue than you will have given the example of by your practice, if it please God to give His blessing to this commencement of good. Be then always the most virtuous."

All the Sisters here declared their willingness to observe faithfully what had just been recommended, and knelt to receive the benediction of their Father. Vincent then resumed his discourse. "Twelve fishermen were chosen as pillars of the Church: and five or six village girls are the foundation of this company. Oh, how different are the works of God from those of men!" The work, though still imperfect, was now begun and founded without the founders being conscious that they were doing a great work; and St. Vincent de Paul to the last hour of his life declined the honor of having given it existence. "Be not deceived, my daughters," he would say; "God alone has created your company. We never

had the intention of forming it. Ah! when the first of you came to serve the poor in the parishes of Paris, who would have thought of there ever being Daughters of Charity? Indeed, my daughters, I thought it not, nor your Sister Servant; God alone thought of it. He is then the author of your company, since we can find no other."* The Saint was right. God alone could see through the vista of time the immense tree that should grow from this grain of mustard-seed; but if it be true that St. Vincent suspected not the greatness of his work, we must own that it was his inspiration to commence it. The last biographer of St. Jane de Chantal believed and repeated that St. Vincent borrowed the first idea of his institute from the foundress of the Visitation, and that he was pleased to show in the growing company the heritage of Mme. de Chantal† and Francis de Sales, who had been obliged by the timidity of the Archbishop of Lyons and the pressure of public opinion to give their creation a different end from what they had at first contemplated.

The fact is not so. The truth is, that visiting the poor, a duty first consigned to the Visitation, was only a secondary work for them, and so accessory that *two* Sisters only were named each month to make the visits; the turn of each Sister coming round not oftener than once in the year: so that the community

* Conference, Jan. 6, 1642.

† M. Bougaud, "*Histoire de Sainte de Chantal*," v. ii., pp. 252, 253.

were employed only in the works of interior contemplative life.*

* The question has already been treated elsewhere. The text of the passage which is devoted to this subject is found in the authentic edition of the *Mémoires* of Mère de Chaugy, published by the religious of the monastery at Annecy, and runs thus: "This article [the visits of the sick] has given place in our time to a false interpretation of the thoughts of the founders of the Visitation. It has been said they wished to form a kind of Congregation of Sisters of Charity; but even the Constitutions of St. Francis de Sales prove that the visits to the sick was a secondary work. This Congregation has been erected that no great obstacle might hinder the weak and infirm from being received, and in it aspire to the perfection of divine love." This was his end: to gather into the feast of the King, to most intimate union with God, faithful generous souls with feeble bodies. Hence Mother de Chaugy assures us: "The principal care and dearest affection of our holy Mother was to ground her Daughters well in the spirit of true interior life, to which everything else tended, so that they sought only mortification, recollection, silence, and retreat in God." This intention of Francis de Sales was understood even by the public, as is proved by the memoirs of the time; and P. Armand, a Jesuit, answering the Saint, who had written for his opinion on the reunion of Mme. de Chantal and her first daughters, wrote (as is seen in page 146): "Your company is raised up to imitate the hidden, contemplative, benign life of Jesus. It will not resort to works of charity, knowing that to visit the sick was one of the accessory practices, and not one of the ends, of the Congregation. We shall be more convinced of this if we remark that two Sisters only were named to visit for a month, making it not each one's turn more than once in the year, so that the community might be employed in the exercises of interior contemplative life. There is then no relationship established between the birth of the Visitation and Congregations founded for the education of youth, or the companies of charity who are in daily contact with the poor of Jesus Christ." ("Ste. Jeanne-Françoise Frémyot, sa Vie et ses Œuvres," v. i., p. 159.)

“The testimony of the Founder himself is worth all the others. The principal end in erecting the congregation at Annecy,” says St. Francis de Sales,* was to furnish a retreat for the infirm and widows. As to visiting the sick, it was added rather to conform to the devotion of those who had commenced that work, and to the character of the place, than as a principal end. Hence when Mgr. Marquemont wished to make the sisters cloistered, the bishop of Geneva consented, finding the intention of the congregation more easily accomplished under this new form.† As to the name *Visitation* (in which some have found an allusion to the visiting of sick), it was chosen only because this was a hidden mystery, not celebrated in the church like the others.‡ However charming the expression of such a thought may be, we cannot (and especially since the latest publications) represent to ourselves St. Vincent yielding all at once, on the cessation of the plague (1628), to the repeated entreaties of Mme. de Chantal and deciding through her zeal “to realize her sublime inspiration” of twenty years before.

The facts we have tried to relate show, on the contrary, that St. Vincent had no plan mapped out in

We may add to this declaration that the text of Mother Chaugy, on which is based the opinion we combat, is not to be found in the new edition.

* Answer to Mgr. Marquemont; *Œuvres complètes de St. François de Sales* (ed. Migne), vol. vi. p. 1141.

† Ibid.

‡ Ibid., vol. vii. p. 383.

advance; and we know, also, that when the idea unfolded under the breath of God, it was still in opposition to the manners and ideas of the time. A community of young girls destined to nurse the sick at their own houses, and having ordinarily no monastery but the dwellings of the sick; their cell a hired room, their chapel the parish church, their enclosure the streets of the city or wards of the hospital; having no grate but the fear of God, no veil but holy modesty*—this was an innovation, strange, bold, to the eyes of some *rash*, at a time when women consecrated to God, hidden under a veil which enveloped the whole body, were protected from the dangers of the world by the walls of a monastery, and gratings, “which,” as Bossuet says, “seem to threaten those who approach.”†

This miracle is now a fact. Christians are no longer surprised to meet in the street, in the garret of the poor, in infidel countries, or on the field of battle, the white cornette of the Daughters of St. Vincent. May we not say that the world itself, understanding nothing of penance or prayer, ignorant of the vocation to a cloister, admires, while it persecutes, this humble Daughter who heals its wounds, calms its sorrows, dries its tears; and becoming mother without ceasing to be virgin, receives and brings up its children?‡

* Rules, chap. i. § 2.

† Bossuet, Sermon: de Vêture de Mlle. de Bouillon.

‡ M. Bougand, “Histoire de Ste. de Chantal.”

CHAPTER VII.

1634—1636.

The Rivals of Louise in Charity—Mme. Goussault's Visit to the Hôtel-Dieu—Mlle. Le Gras removes with her Daughters to La Chapelle.



THE COURSE of our story brings us to a new work, or rather a new branch of the charity, in the prosperity of which Mlle. Le Gras was to be actively engaged, although it was not under her immediate direction. Before relating the exterior circumstances in which this work was commenced we must give expression to a reflection suggested more than once by this narrative. Scarcely ever did St. Vincent de Paul take the initiative in the works he was to accomplish. Docile worker in the hands of the Master, penetrated with fear lest he would compromise the work of God by human activity, he reflected and studied a long time before undertaking anything. Attentive to lose no inspiration, he was equally afraid of advancing the time or going beyond the Divine Will. The thought that he might push the affair too far made him, as he said, "tremble with fright."* Thus he rather waited for

* Letter to Mlle. Le Gras.

indications from on high than tried to find them. Hence it often happened that Christian women, before becoming his co-laborers, were the Angels of God, by their faith or charity, to show him what God willed. Some of these were ladies of high rank, others of obscure origin; but the weakness of the instrument only served better to show the skill of the artisan. The devotion of one woman of whom we know only the name, Mme. de la Chassaigne, gave occasion to the establishment of the Confraternities of Charity; another more celebrated, Mme. de Gondy, took the initiative soon after, and gave Vincent the means necessary to found these confraternities; and while the President de Herse contributed powerfully by his alms to establish retreats preparatory to orders, the widow of a young magistrate was pondering over the work we are about to describe.

Too interesting to be forgotten here, this lady is all the more worthy of notice as she made the acquaintance of Mlle. Le Gras precisely at this time, either in the parlor of Saint Lazare or in the Hôtel-Dieu, where both used to visit the sick. Her name was Genevieve Fayet. Her husband, President of Exchequer, M. Goussault,* died 1631, leaving her with five children. The biographers of St. Vincent have preserved their memory. Rich and of remarkable beauty, she could still have looked forward to

* Antoine Goussault, Lord of Souvigny, Counsellor of the King and his Councils, and President of the Office of Exchequer, baptized at St. Gervais June 17, 1584. (Bibl. Nat. MSS., 1329.)

happy relations with the world; but she renounced it to devote herself generously to the poor, especially the sick; and Collet confirms what we say, while he testifies to her eminent charity.

Both ladies had remained unknown to the outside world, and even their own estimate of their worth was much below the truth; which is plainly proved by documents afterwards brought to light. The assistance rendered to the Confraternity of Charity by Mme. Goussault, as well in Paris as in the neighboring country, soon revealed her virtue and rare intelligence for good. This was especially evident in the visits made with Mlle. Le Gras with whom Vincent associated her. On one of these visits she wrote* to St. Vincent from Angers, April 16, 1633, and her

*This precious document, without signature, was found in the Library St. Genevieve amongst a voluminous collection of letters, most of them addressed to P. Faure, reformer of the Abbey. It was published 1854, in the *Revue de l'Anjou*, and attributed to Mlle. Le Gras; reproduced as emanating from her by Maynard in his history of St. Vincent de Paul. This opinion seems scarcely justified. We cannot recognize in this letter the style or the habits of Mlle. Le Gras. She never travelled with lackeys or *fermiers à cheval*, and never spoke to her servants on the way, for the good reason that she never had any. Moreover, her writing was irregular and not so plain. The writing in this is large, firm, and masterly, so to speak. Everything inclines us to believe this the letter of Mme. Goussault. Moreover, by happy chance a specimen of her writing more lengthy than this, from the National Library, has been found in an autograph sent from China to Paris to help the publication of St. Vincent's letters. An examination and comparison of the two proves the writing of that published in the *Revue de l'Anjou* to be without doubt that of Mme. Goussault.

letter gives us an insight into Mme. Goussault, who is there portrayed in charming simplicity, relating her thoughts and exercises while on her journey; "the prayer which she made with her companions, the chanting of litanies, of the Alleluia and other hymns, so joyously that the lackey* who followed them on horseback was quite charmed." In short, her prayer intermingled with sweet recreations; and works of zeal might make us suppose her "another Mme. d'Angrie."

At Angerville she teaches the sign of the cross to little children, and to grown-up persons employed in weaving bunting, whose ignorance of that sacred sign moved her to pity. At Arthenay she taught catechism even inside the church. Arriving at Angers, she is received with honor and, as she says herself, treated like a grandee. The magistrates and chief men of the place called on her, and for two days she had no free time except the hour of Mass. Afterwards she visited the prisons, set free the poor salt-smugglers, and instructed the women and children of the place, who appeared to her very much in want of instruction. The enthusiasm enkindled by her is indescribable. A priest who listened to her said he would think himself happy to spend and finish his life near her, were it only to listen to the words coming from her mouth; and among hundreds who were listening to her, one exclaimed, "It is plain that you love the poor and are in the joy of your heart with

* Mme. de G. possessed a property near Bourgneuf, in Anjou.

them. You are twice as beautiful when speaking to them!" This success astonishes her; she artlessly seeks the cause, and finds it in the simplicity of her manner. In short, she goes to the parishes, where she makes no reform, and condescends to everything not sinful—even to play backgammon for an hour one day.* However she managed, she so gained all hearts that it was said "if she remained one year at Angers she would convert the whole village." But the humble woman, insensible to praise, thought only of the poor, particularly the poor sick in the hospital. In her conduct towards the sick we see the sentiments expressed in her letter and the justification of our opinion concerning it.

From Etrechy, her first halting-place, to Angers, the term of her journey, her first care on arriving was always to inform herself of the Hôtel-Dieu, and to go there whatever the distance from her stopping-place. It seemed as if her only intention on the journey was to visit the hospices of the province and study the treatment of the poor at those places. A fact which supports this supposition is that a few months after her return she made a proposition to St. Vincent which related to the sick of the Hôtel-Dieu in Paris.

Mlle. Le Gras had for some time been anxious to

* Her only remorse was refusing to have her picture taken as was the custom of ladies in the city—even the little bourgeois, whose portraits were placed on the tombstones. "It is perhaps a false humility not to wish to appear so vain, and there would be more virtue in greater condescension."

ameliorate their condition, and had already made a communication to St. Vincent on the subject ; but this wish, common to several souls at that time, was given a precise form by Mme. Goussault.

This was to extend to the sick of the Hôtel-Dieu the charity exercised towards the poor of the parishes. This would occasion the expenditure of great alms. The Hôtel-Dieu, which had just been enlarged by a hall to extend to the river,* received at that time from a thousand to twelve hundred sick. From twenty to twenty-five thousand persons passed through it every year. What a field for charity ! Nevertheless St. Vincent, with his usual reserve, excused himself. He did not wish, he said, to encroach on a domain which was not his own ; neither had he the power or authority to reform the abuses which must have glided into that establishment. Mme. Goussault, seeing that she obtained nothing from Vincent, would not relinquish her design, but went to the archbishop of Paris, whose authority could remove all obstacles. This essay was more fortunate ; Mgr. de Gondy was easily persuaded, and sent to St. Vincent saying that he would be most happy to see a society of ladies formed for the express purpose of attending to the sick of the Hôtel-Dieu. In this advice from the prelate the Saint recognized the will of God, and yielded the point.

He then permitted Mme. Goussault to assem-

* *Piganiolle de la Force*, t. i. p. 401. This addition made twenty halls in the Hôtel-Dieu.

ble in her house, Rue Roi-de-Sicile,* some pious women whom he consented to preside over, and whose names he has himself preserved to us. "The assembly took place yesterday at Mme. Goussault's," wrote St. Vincent the following day to Mlle. Le Gras, who was not able to be present. "Mmes. de Villesavin,† de Bailleul,‡ du Mecq, Saintot,§ and Pollalion|| were present." The Saint commenced by laying out the plan of the projected work. The proposition to visit the sick regularly was agreed on in theory; but as to the practical part, the attendance was so small at this first meeting that nothing could be decided upon. They resolved to pray and receive Holy Communion that God would give them light, to endeavor to make proselytes amongst their friends, and agreed on the necessity of soliciting forthwith the aid of Mlle. Le Gras and her Daugh-

* Rue Roi-de-Sicile exists partly at present, and is between Rue Rivoli and Rue Franks-Bourgeois.

† Mme. Villesavin, widow of Phélippeaux, Lord of Villesavin, was long acquainted with Mlle. Le Gras. This we find by a letter from Mgr. Camus. She occupied two beautiful mansions on the Place Royale where she entertained the highest society. She was called, from her ceremonious manner, the most humble servant of the human race.

‡ Mme. de Bailleul, wife of the Superintendent of Finance of that name.

§ Mme. de Saintot, maiden name Dalibray, wife of the Treasurer of France. She received in her house the Pascal family, and educated with her own daughters the celebrated Jacqueline. Voiture dedicated to her his translation of "Roland furieux."

|| St. Vincent and Mgr. Camus wrote always *Poullalion* instead of *Pollalion*. We have adopted the latter orthography, used formerly by the author of her Life.

ters. They judged that four Sisters would be necessary, and St. Vincent notified Louise immediately, adding, "Your work is growing; strengthen yourself, then, as much as you can."

On the following Monday the ladies met again.* This time their number was six,* among whom were Mme. Segurier,† wife of the Chancellor, Mme. de Traversay,‡ the good and saintly Mme. Fouquet,§ and Mlle. Le Gras. The visiting of the hospital had been already decided upon. The question now was to organize. Mme. Goussault was placed at the head of the work. She would take no other title than Servant.¶ Mlle. Viole¶ was named as her assistant, and

* Recueil manuscrit de diverses pièces appartenant à la conduite et direction des dames de la Charité de Paris. (Arch. de la Mission.)

† Elizabeth d'Aligre, wife of Pierre Segurier, who was made Keeper of the Seals in 1633.

‡ Anne Petau, widow of M. Regnauld, Lord of Traversay, Counsellor in the Parliament of Paris. She lived in Rue Saint-Martin with President Meliand, her brother. She founded, in 1635, the monastery of the Conception, Rue Saint-Honoré, and was engaged with the Daughters of the Cross after the death of their foundress, Mme. de Villeneuve.

§ Marie Mauprou, mother of the celebrated Superintendent of Finance; a heroine, who, on hearing of the disgrace of her son, exclaimed, "Thank God! I asked God for the salvation of my son. This is the way to it." Her five daughters entered the Visitation. Mme. Fouquet had taste and a special aptitude for tending the sick, and composed a collection of medical receipts.

¶ The Superiors of the Hôtel-Dieu, in their commencement, took the name of Servant from the good Mme. Goussault. (Conférence de Saint Vincent aux Filles de la Charité, June 20, 1642.)

¶ Mlle. Viole busied herself in the work of the hospital, and filled

Mme. Pollalion, though busy with the foundation of the Daughters of Providence in the village of Charonne, consented to take the office of secretary. St. Vincent, who could not refuse the directorship, traced out for them their rule of conduct.

His first recommendation was discretion in regard to the religious already established in the house. The situation was a delicate one. There were nearly one hundred and thirty Augustinians who were very regular; and if their Superior, Mother of the Holy Name, twenty years in charge, could not give each sick person a bed, she had not been idle, for the beds, food, and medicines were better than formerly. Not to wound the just sensitiveness of Mother and Daughters, St. Vincent invoked the assistance of our Lord, the true Father of the poor, through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin and St. Louis, founder of the house; he then advised the ladies to present themselves to the religious and ask, as a favor, to be allowed to assist them in serving the sick, also to look upon them as the true mistresses of the house and spouses of Jesus Christ.

As to the poor, whose consolation and instruction is the end of the work, the ladies should treat them with meekness and humility, and not make them sad by any show of riches or luxury, but approach them simply and modestly dressed. "In speaking to them the office of assistant or treasurer until her death, April 4, 1678. "How consoled and edified I am by that good young lady!" exclaimed St. Vincent. She lived in Rue de la Harpe.

avoid appearing learned, and always have a little book in your hand so as not to seem as if preaching." (Little books of Christian virtue could be printed on purpose.) "Always make use of such formulas as 'I was taught' . . . 'I was advised' . . . 'I was taught to make my confession this way,' etc. Man is so constituted that good done the body often opens the way to the heart. This you must never forget."

Mme. Goussault made a new proposition on this subject. She had remarked that the sick were confined to two meals per day—dinner and supper, without anything between—for want of having nutriment adapted to their condition. She had remarked this with regret, the more so as the sentiment of Christian equality was strongly impressed on her mind. She therefore suggested to hire a room near the Hôtel-Dieu in which the Daughters of Charity could prepare a collation and make jellies and other delicacies for the sick. They could accompany the ladies afterwards and help them to distribute the good things. Every one agreed to this proposal, and they separated, promising to act without delay.

The plan was drawn up, and the work commenced under the happiest auspices. Gained over by the meek, deferential bearing of the ladies, the Augustinian religious left them free to go through the apartments, and even seconded all their plans. Mlle. Le Gras was authorized by them to bring four of her Daughters, Sisters Genevieve, Jacqueline, Germaine,

and Nicole. She labored herself at this new work with so much zeal that St. Vincent again obliged her to moderate. He wrote: "To be always at the Hôtel-Dieu is not expedient; to go at times will be sufficient. Do not fear to undertake too much in doing what is presented to you; but fear to undertake more than God will give you the means to accomplish. I thank our Lord for the great grace of generosity in His service which He has given to your Daughters."

The generosity of these Daughters was but a reflection from that of the ladies. This work, which St. Vincent considered the same as the charity in the parishes,* was not organized more than a month when the society numbered from one hundred to one hundred and twenty members. Every afternoon, about one o'clock, a crowd of noble ladies, among them princesses and duchesses, assembled at the Hôtel-Dieu, and after adoring the Blessed Sacrament, separated in groups of four to go through the wards. Each one, wearing a white apron and accompanied by a Sister of Charity, went from bed to bed distributing jellies, biscuit, or broth; and afterward remained, as Mlle. Le

* "May it please God," he wrote to one of his missionaries, July 23, 1634 (M. Coudray in Rome), "that you obtain indulgences for the Confréries of Charity, which by the grace of God do such wonders. We have them established in several of our parishes in Paris, and one is composed of one hundred or one hundred and twenty ladies of rank, who come every day and help to nurse eight or nine hundred sick, working in groups of four."

Gras reported, sitting by the sick for hours (sometimes at the risk of their life); talking to them, teaching them to examine their conscience, to prepare for general confession, with regret for the past and purpose of amendment. This preparation complete, the ladies called the chaplain to finish their work—as, thanks to the charity and liberality of the ladies, there were chaplains attached to the hospital. Thus, in the course of the first year, they prepared more than seven hundred and sixty conversions—Lutherans, Calvinists, even Turks wounded in sea-fights. The expense was great; but Mlle. Le Gras had opened a source of revenue for them from the confectionery, jellies, etc., made by the Daughters of Charity—over and above what they made for the sick—and which was sold in Paris for the benefit of the Hôtel-Dieu. Without official title, Mlle. Le Gras was, we might say, not only the mainspring of the work by the services of every kind which she rendered, but also a type for imitation to her associates by the indefatigable zeal with which she labored.

In calling on Louise to make a part of the company for the Hôtel-Dieu, Vincent only thought of giving the benefit of her experience to the ladies, who were, of course, only novices in the exercise of charity; but the helps he afforded them had another result for herself not less beneficial, that of putting her in relationship with ladies of high rank, rich and influential, who could help her in the provinces by establishing near their estates the

first houses of the Daughters of Charity. It will be shown afterward how greatly this concurred to the support of the work; for the present we wish to introduce, by some traits of character, the pious phalanx of ladies around Mme. Goussault and Mlle. Le Gras. The political or literary ladies of the seventeenth century have had their biographers, often their panegyrists; how deplorable that the great Christian women of this religious movement should be, for the most part, ignored and no writer found to draw their names from oblivion!

To mention only the group having the Hôtel-Dieu for centre. The ladies who composed it extended their charity to nearly all the works of St. Vincent de Paul. They founded with him the General Hospital and Foundling Asylum. They supported missions in France, Italy, the British Isles, Poland, Germany, and beyond the seas. They contributed to the redemption of captives in Barbary, and bestowed large alms in provinces laid waste by war--Lorraine, Picardy, and Champagne. Mlle. le Gras, too modest to mention her own part in this concert of devotion, has left us, in a few lines, a picture of the good effected under her own observation. She writes: "It is very evident in this century that Divine Providence makes use of our sex to show that ours alone helps the people in affliction. The Spirit of God who presides over the assemblies of the ladies makes them serve the poor so charitably and so munificently that Paris is an example and a sub-

ject of admiration for the whole kingdom. Not only France, but almost the whole habitable world, has reaped the fruit of their good works. Thanks to them for countless souls who now enjoy the Beatific Vision and honor God in heaven! The ladies themselves have entered on the road of sanctity, in recompense for their charity. If all that they have done could be enumerated, the truth of what I write would be seen."

It would be a pleasure to follow up the traces of each one; but not wishing to overstep the natural limits of our subject, we must confine ourselves to a glance at those only who figure conspicuously.

The result of the first two meetings is known to the reader. But to the ten ladies who founded the work which still exists, viz: that of visiting the hospital, almost a hundred others, had been added "whose names," said St. Vincent, "God has inscribed in the Book of Life." We shall first mention three of the spiritual daughters of St. Francis de Sales, who seemed to have imbibed some of his spirit. The first of these was Charlotte de Ligny, widow of the President de Herse, a woman of eminent piety "incapable of recoil from any good work,"* dear as his own soul to the bishop of Geneva.† She was

* Collet, "Vie de Saint Vincent de Paul," t. ii. p. 343.

† See a charming letter from St. Francis de Sales to the Présidente de Herse, dated from Annecy, July 7, 1616. La Présidente de Herse lived in Rue Pavée. She survived St. Vincent and Mlle. Le Gras two years only.

the mainstay of the Confraternity at Saint-Sulpice, and one of Mlle. Le Gras' dearest co-laborers.

Not less fervent in good works was Marie l'Huilier, widow of Claude de Villeneuve, *Maitre des requêtes ordinaires de l'hôtel du roi*. St. Francis de Sales had introduced her to Mme. de Chantal as "the most sincere and best heart he knew," and her acquaintance with Mgr. Camus had made her intimate for a long time with Mlle. le Gras. She visited the poor at St. Paul's before she founded the first house of the Daughters of the Cross. This was at Vaugirard (August 4, 1641).

Not having a growing community to provide for like Mme. de Villeneuve, Marie des Landes could devote herself more to the work of the hospital where she was one day to be Superioress. She was the wife of Chrétien de Lamoignon, *Président à mortier* for the Parliament of Paris. In the opinion of St. Francis de Sales she was "one of the holiest women of his time." He could speak of her thus, as we read in his unpublished* works, because she had been a long time under his direction. And the author adds: "She assisted every day at all the Offices, commencing the day by hearing matins—at four o'clock in summer, and five o'clock in winter." One day when she fainted it was perceived that she wore a hair-cloth, and an iron chain with points so sharp that she was wounded in several places. Her

* "Vie de Mlle. de Lamoignon," par le P. d'Orleans.

zeal for visiting the sick found an echo in the heart of her two daughters, who had never known anything "of childhood but its docility, or of youth but appearance and years."* The older, Anne, married a master of supplies, M. de Nesmond; the younger never married, the better to devote herself to works of mercy. The virtuous mother, whose charity had given her the title of "Mère des Pauvres," † rejoiced to have a daughter who could assist the poor with and after her. Their apartments were always full of people, who were never refused. Money, linen, clothing, seemed common property with the family and the poor who were in need. It was not rare for the family to have nothing to eat at meal-time; the mother and daughter had given it all away. They made out as best they could; and what is still more wonderful is that neither father nor son ever found fault, contenting themselves with some little jest at the expense of those who were thus prodigal. The blessed name of Mme. and Mlle. Lamoignon will often appear on these pages.

Perhaps the most illustrious among these generous women walking with such zeal in the path of perfection, and the one who most closely copied Mlle. Le Gras, was Madame de Combalet, better known in history as the Duchess of Aiguillon. Being left a widow

* "Vie de Mlle. de Lamoignon."

† When St. Vincent visited Mlle. de Lamoignon, it was said "There goes the Father of the poor to visit their Mother." She then lived in Harley Court (now called Rue de Harlay).

at the age of eighteen, she divided her time between the Court and Carmel. She was obliged by her rank and by the friendship of two queens to live at the Court which she loved not, and would have gladly buried herself in Carmel had not the authority of Cardinal Richelieu, her uncle, closed its gates against her. She often visited there, however—"hastening to it with the wings of the dove."* Her sole occupation was to distribute her wealth between the missions, the hospital, and the prisons.† When, toward 1636, the Confraternity of Charity was established at Saint-Sulpice, she was one of the most active associates of that parish, which counted several persons of admirable generosity. We shall only name here the Duchess of Liancourt, a long time the intimate friend of Mlle. Le Gras, and of whom we shall speak more at length; the Countess of Lomenie de Brienne,‡ wife of the Secretary of State, who established the Daughters of Charity at her house in Champagne; and Mlle. de L'Etang, who founded a house for orphans, and whom St. Vincent sent to Louise to learn from her the difficult science of governing souls. §

* Fléchier, "Oraison funèbre de la Duchesse d'Aiguillon."

† See, for details, "La Duchesse d'Aiguillon," par. M. Bonneau-Avenant. Paris: Didier. 1879.

‡ Mme. de Brienne lived in Rue des Saints Pères.

§ To these illustrious ladies of the parish of Saint-Sulpice we shall add, without too much detail, some others who seemed to have relations less direct with Louise, but whose names will serve to show what were

If the ladies just mentioned assisted Mlle. Le Gras in her mission of providence, she in her turn had given them back in spiritual charity what she had received. This is an exchange quite common in the lives of the saints. Not only did she exercise toward them the silent apostleship of example, but she often practised that of counsel in the retreats which several of the ladies made in her house and under her direction.

Very soon the little lodging in Rue St. Victor was the resources of the Confraternity of Charity in this quarter. These are:

First, the Princess of Condé, mother of the great Condé and of Madame de Longueville, who by her charity had merited from the Carmelites the title of foundress and the right to live in an apartment of the convent. After the death of her husband she followed a very perfect rule of life drawn up for her by M. Olier, and left by her will 10,000 livres for the construction of the new church of Saint-Sulpice (1650).

Mme. de Rantzau, widow of the Marshal of that name, died 1666, in the convent of the Annunciates which she had founded at Hildesheim. She had been a Lutheran and had studied her theology from a Protestant standpoint. After zealous study she was convinced of the truth of Catholicity, but resisted for two years; at length she became a Catholic, converted her husband and a number of heretics.

Mme. Leschassier, devoted to the service of the sick; also her daughter, who founded a home for orphans, Rue du Vieux Colombier, in the house where the Novitiate of the Daughters of Charity was established at the commencement of our century.

The Marchioness of Palaiseau, one of the ladies of the Hôtel-Dieu, who gave her bed, worth 20,000 livres, to make a canopy for the exposition of the Blessed Sacrament at Saint-Sulpice. This she did in expiation of a sacrilege committed in that church in 1648. The Baroness of Neuville, in the same spirit of reparation, condemned herself

not large enough, and Louise, often called away to the provinces, was obliged to be absent. In the course of the year 1635 she went to Attichy, on the invitation of her cousin, and to Beauvais,* where difficulties had arisen; the priests, wanting to rule the Confraternity and the bishop, who wished to attach to it the Rosary of the Dominicans, opposing it, and the ladies, whose zeal had abated. She returned at this time to Liancourt, which she had visited several years before, and where the ladies offered her a place for two Sisters† of Charity, whose duty

to eat only black bread and drink only water. She died in great renown for virtue, 1657.

Claude de Sève, widow of M. Tronson and mother of the future Superior of Saint-Sulpice, directed successively by Father Condren—whose letter to her on the dispositions for Holy Communion, dated Aug. 5, 1630, is preserved to this day at Saint-Sulpice—and M. Olier, who, seeing her gifted with rare dispositions for virtue, took particular care in her perfection. She founded, with Mme. de Saujon, a house of retreats for ladies of the world.

Finally, the Marchioness de Fénelon, Catherine de Monbernon, who died in the odor of sanctity, 1646. "Our dear daughter, Mme. de Fénelon," wrote M. Olier, "is at present honored as a saint by a wonderful concourse of persons who visit her corpse, so strong is the impression which true piety makes on the heart."

We might name many more of these ladies.

* She stopped with a good charitable hostess, Mme. de Villegoublin, whom Providence had brought to Beauvais to do good. (Lettre de St. Vincent à Mlle. Le Gras, 21 juillet 1635.)

† Jeanne de Schomberg, Duchesse de Liancourt, born 1600, died 1674, passed a great part of the year at Liancourt, which she had founded and embellished with royal magnificence. She composed a treatise for her granddaughter on the occasion of her marriage

would be to prepare medicine for the sick of the village and neighborhood, whom they were to visit twice a week.

The Duchess of Liancourt, then in the full bloom of youth, was a woman of rare virtue and intelligence. She professed for Louise an affection which the latter reciprocated with all fervor, offering her services in case of sickness—"an offering which the Duchess would never accept, being solicitous on her part for the health of her friend." Later on she received her into her house to make a retreat. A day was to come when this holy friendship would be forever destroyed. A stranger to the ideas of Port-Royal, the Duchess nevertheless received the visits of the scholars of that sect, and consented to hold a controversial correspondence with them. This she told to Mlle. Le Gras. "They wanted to gain her," writes Mlle. Le Gras to one of her Daughters, "and they commenced by writing to her, and she showed me her answer. It is incredible how she let herself be caught; she feared it so much. As for me, I praise the goodness of God in keeping me out of the snare in which I might have been caught from the great sympathy there was between us."

which shows great elevation of thought. It was styled "*Règlement donné par un dame de haute qualité à N., sa petite-fille.*" It was printed for the first time in 1698, and republished in 1881 with a notice by the Marchioness de Forbin d'Oppède. In the Archives of the Mission is an affectionate letter from her to Mlle. Le Gras, whom she styles her "dear friend."

The Duchess yielded, and, like Eve, drew her husband after her. Their intercourse with Father Desmares, her frequent visits to Port-Royal-des-Champs, where they constructed a hermitage, and the controversy they occasioned, raised a wall of separation, little by little, between Louise and the lady of Liancourt, who still preserved her friendly manner, but studiously avoided all religious conversation. "I have lost her friendship," said Louise, "but God be praised! How dangerous it is to wish to know more than God has taught us!"

The absence of Mlle. Le Gras did not destroy the little community growing up around her,* which Mme. Pollalion took care to watch over. Three girls from Colombes, presented by Sister Jeanne of St. Bennet's parish, three country girls from Argenteuil, and a lace-maker from Liancourt, who could, if need were, teach the sick women her trade, had filled the void made in the little flock from which one had gone away without giving any reason, and another had died in the exercise of that virtue in which no one can be lost—charity.†

The labors of those who remained faithful daily increased from all sides. Distant cities, Sedan for instance, at the foot of the Ardennes, were petitioning for Daughters, and in Paris the Confraternity was

* "Mme. Pollalion can sometimes see your Daughters," wrote St. Vincent to Mlle. Le Gras. (Letter 48.) "Mme Pollalion hopes to remain at your house to-night." (Letter 49.)

† Letter 81.

established in several new parishes, such as St. Laurence, where Louise remained several days to arrange matters, St. Germaine l'Auxerrois, and St. Etienne.* In some of the confraternities the ladies had fallen off, and the charge of the poor weighed heavily on the Daughters. Thus, Sister Marguerite † of St. Paul, her burden becoming heavier and heavier, asked for a reinforcement of companions.

But if it were evident that help was needed for the growing proportions of the work, it was also clear that a locality should be chosen better suited to their purpose.

The little house which up to this time had sheltered the family of Daughters was so scant that for want of a separate room for the sick they were obliged to hasten the burial of a Sister whose loss they were mourning. Besides, being on the left bank of the Seine, they were at a distance from the priory of St. Lazarus, which had become, by a pious substitution of work, the seat of the Mission and the ordinary residence of St. Vincent de Paul.‡ Hence this dis-

* December 1636.

† It is probably the same Sister Marguerite who had this touching colloquy with the Baron de Renty, one of the holiest men of his time. Meeting her on the stairs going to the sick he said, "Whom do you seek, Sister?" "Jesus Christ, sir." "And I also, Sister," said he; and from that day the gentleman wished to be associated in all the good works of the Daughters of Charity. ("Vie de N. de Renty," par St. Jure. Paris: Rue St. Jacques, chez Pière Le Petit—à la croix d'or. 1633.)

‡ The old lazar-house of St. Lazarus, on the road from Paris to St.

tance, to which we owe in part the correspondence of Mlle. Le Gras and St. Vincent,* so precious for our history, was an obstacle to the frequent communication which was necessary; for although they had agreed to see each other only as circumstances required, they often had need, one of counsel, the other of service. A change of residence was therefore resolved upon.

Louise desired to purchase a house; but St. Vincent, without disapproving of her plan, inclined toward a simple location, more easy, as he said, "to make and unmake, and more conformed to the ex-

Denis, had been from the sixteenth century a house of canons regular. In 1631 the Prior, Adrien le Bon, offered to St. Vincent, for the missionaries, his benefice, to which considerable revenue was attached. The Saint at first refused, but at last accepted. The contract was made January 7, 1632. Five days after, the work was raised to the rank of a congregation by Urban VIII., under the name of Priests of the Mission. The house of St. Lazarus belonged no more to the Sons of St. Vincent, who had to leave it, September 1792. The buildings, still in part existing, serve as a prison. St. Vincent's room is still preserved, converted into a chapel. The site of the vast enclosure is occupied by the church of St. Vincent de Paul, the railroad station north, and streets adjoining.

* See, in a collection recently published by a priest of the Mission, the letters of St. Vincent to Mlle. Le Gras. Those of Mlle. to St. Vincent are unpublished. Many are unfortunately lost, owing to the humility of the Saint, who hastened to destroy all that could redound to his praise. The burning of St. Lazarus in 1789 made away with a great number, for there remain scarcely two dated between 1625 and 1636, and four between 1636 and 1643; fourteen others come in the four following years, from 1643 to 1646, and ninety-six during the last fourteen years of their life. About forty are without date.

ample of Jesus Christ, who probably never had a house of His own in this world." He looked at a house in the Faubourg St. Martin, but there was not room enough in it; another, for forty or fifty thousand livres, proposed by Mme. Goussault, appeared to him "too handsome for poor Daughters;" and a third was too far from the church. A little farm, provided with stable and granary in country style, was offered, but it was too far from the centre of their labors; but a house "at La Chapelle, a village near this, going to St. Denis," wrote St. Vincent, "seemed to unite the principal advantages they sought; viz., the neighborhood of St. Lazarus, clear air from the fields, life in the country among the good people whose ways of living, habits, and employments the Daughters were already accustomed to"—and he might add, in the midst of souvenirs left by another girl of the fields, St. Genevieve, whom he would one day give them for a model.*

Mlle. Le Gras and the Superior of the Hôtel-Dieu, whom she made it a duty to consult * in all her concerns, favored this proposition, and the purchase was decided upon. The contract was signed by Mme. Goussault and published, according to usage, the

* Conference of January 25, 1643. There had been formerly at La Chapelle a hospice where St. Genevieve came from Saturday night to Sunday with her companions to celebrate the next day at the tomb of St. Denis. The parish was small—a hundred houses—extended little on the side of Paris. St. Laurent was near enough. (Lebœuf, *Histoire de Diocèse de Paris.*)

† Letter of St. Vincent.

next Sunday at the sermon,* and in May 1636† Louise, leaving some of her Daughters to take care of the little house in the Faubourg St. Victor until rented again, came to install herself with those named by St. Vincent in La Chapelle.

* Letter 124.

† Gobillon, p. 74.

CHAPTER VIII.

1636—1640.

New Labors undertaken at La Chapelle—Catechism—Ladies' Retreats—The Spanish Army in Picardy—Mlle. Le Gras gives Asylum to the Fugitives—She sends two of her Daughters to Richelieu—Opening of the Foundling Asylum—Death of Mme. Goussault—Voyage to Angers—The first Hospital attended by the Daughters of Charity.



AMONG the detached notes collected by pious hands after the death of Mlle. Le Gras we find a paper on which is written several thoughts on abandonment to the will of God, and at the end these lines: "To go to a new lodging with the design of there honoring Divine Providence who conducts us, and in the disposition of doing there all that the same Providence will permit. To honor by this change of residence that of Jesus and the Holy Virgin from Bethlehem to Egypt and thence to other places—not wishing more than they to have a dwelling-place on earth."

Such were the dispositions of Louise in taking possession of La Chapelle-Saint-Denis. To draw the blessing of God on this new establishment, she commenced by spending some days in complete retreat. This exercise was already, as we know, quite familiar to her; but to judge from a letter of

St. Vincent, she made a general review of her conscience beforehand, and wished to give to this retreat a character of unusual solemnity, as being a point of departure for higher and more perfect ways. "Oh, what a tree you have cultivated in the garden of God, since it has produced such fruits!" the Saint wrote* to her, probably in this same retreat;† and continuing the simile, he complacently adds, in the words of Scripture: "May you ever be a beautiful tree producing the fruits of love!"

It is not permitted us to penetrate farther into the secrets of her soul, or admire the hidden treasures whose enjoyment God had reserved to herself; yet we may know some of the exercises in which she spent these hours of solitude. For six days she retired, and held no communication with externs except what was unavoidable, and that was dispatched as briefly as possible. She adopted for the subject of her prayer the order of the "Introduction to a Devout Life" of the bishop of Geneva; she read the New Testament, and Gerson on the lives of holy widows, to whom she had special devotion. She wrote to St. Vincent every day that she did not see him, to give him a summary of what passed within her soul and her disposition of mind and body. The rest of her time she spent in looking over the past years and revolving the future that was likely to be hers. It was recommended to her above all "not to be eager

* Lettre 132, adressée à "Mlle. Le Gras, à La Chapelle." † Ibid.

or hurried, to go quietly, representing to herself what the good bishop would do,—*our blessed Father*,” as St. Vincent always called him.

She was not permitted to burden herself with rules and practices, but to confirm herself in those she had already undertaken. “She must avoid everything that would lead her out of the simple way to which she was called, and finish the exercises by a concise confession, remembering that hers were generally a little too long.” *

Mlle. Le Gras would have prolonged this retreat if she had not been afraid “to tempt God.” † She gathered from it a renewal of strength and still greater courage; and labored, from the moment she left her retreat, to shed around her the graces she had received. From this time she called together the women and young girls of the village, on Sundays and festivals, to teach them the Catechism; she instructed the children who had attended the common school: but, always observing justice in her charity, she gave the school teacher a sum equivalent to what she had deprived him of. At length, wishing that some of the Ladies of Charity could participate in the happiness she tasted in retreat, she set apart two rooms of her house for such of them as would not be afraid to pass some days in a village house partaking of the simple, poor life practised there. One of the ladies of the Hôtel-Dieu came, bringing

* Lettre 130.

† Ibid.

with her Mlle. Lamy,* to put themselves humbly under the direction of Louise, who, making use of the counsels of St. Vincent, gave them her rule of retreat and directed them in their choice of reading matter and the subject of prayer. Others for retreat soon followed. Mlle. d'Atry, related by her mother to the Marillac family; an actress, decided to change her life; and a young girl preparing to be married—all in turn, not to mention others, placed themselves under the direction of Louise. With what tact and discretion she accepted this new work, and what influence she exerted over these souls, we may learn from the fragments of her letters, too rare, alas!† Louise thus made, with ladies of the world, an apprenticeship of the delicate and important office she was afterwards to fill in regard to her own Daughters. These latter, from time to time, were making trial of the kind of exercises, which had manifested

* Mlle. Lamy, wife of the Director of the Hospital Quinze-Vingts, who afterwards directed the General Hospital.

† One of these letters of Mlle. Le Gras to an unknown lady is particularly deserving of mention. It is without date. In it she defines perfection: "A loving sweet union of the will with that of God. The will," she continues, "is that which God has placed within our power, what He looks for with the action that springs therefrom. Make the least possible reflection, and live in innocent simplicity and familiarity with God. This is the advice which your humility has required from my poverty, and which I transmit quite simply as our Saviour dictates." Her elevated yet practical direction is not less visible in a writing found while these pages were being printed; it is a rule of life adopted by a lady at the close of a retreat, and bears date November 17, 1636.

the extraordinary talent of their Mother in the government of souls.

Exterior events happened, however, which troubled the peace of the little community. It was the commencement of the epoch called by historians the French period of the Thirty Years' War. The campaign was opened by the conquerors, when suddenly, in the early part of July 1636, the Spanish army, commanded by the terrible Jean de Werth, and augmented by adventurers from Poland, Croatia, and Hungary, penetrated into Picardy, marking their passage by pillage and ruin. Terror spread rapidly, especially at the news that Corbie was taken and the Croatian cavalry arriving in Compiègne. It seemed as if the enemy were already camping at Montmartre. The flight was general; a universal rout; every one for himself. Horses, carriages, and wagons blocked up the road from Chartres and Orleans. "Paris awaits a siege from the Spaniards, whose advance-guard extends to ten or twelve miles from here," wrote St. Vincent* on Assumption Day, while the drum was beating in his house at St. Lazarus, which was turned into a camp. "Here the soldiers equip and arm their companies; the stable, the woodshed, the halls and cloister are full of arms, and the court-yard of armed men." The country fled to Paris, and Paris was so frightened that many inhabitants fled to other cities. But, although La Chapelle

* To M. Portail, Aug. 15, 1636.

was situated on the northern road and some hours' journey only from Compiègne, Louise and her Daughters thought not of flight. From this time war had no terrors for the Daughters of Charity, nor could the clash of arms interrupt their good works. Their house, happily large enough, was transformed into a refuge. Joyful to exercise a new virtue, and faithful to the traditions of the first ages, Mlle. Le Gras opened her dwelling to the victims of the invasion. Women and young girls left their unsafe fireside and came in crowds to the frontiers of Picardy. They found in La Chapelle a supply for all their needs, and only quitted this holy asylum after Louise (always attentive to wants often forgotten—the wants of the soul) had given them an opportunity to make a mission.

The repulse of the enemy and the deliverance of Corbie having restored security to the capital, it was necessary to resume work with all the more activity as in several places it had suffered the reaction of public misfortunes. Hence we see Mlle. Le Gras establishing new confraternities in the parishes of Paris and at Passy; visiting, often with Mme. Goussault, the old associations of Montreuil, Pontoise, Gournay, Asnières, Grigny near Longjumeau, and endeavoring to answer the demand for Daughters coming in from all sides. Those whom she had sent out seemed ready for every labor and capable of any act of devotedness. They were called on for the poor, for the sick soldiers at St. Germain, where,

after a retreat, the queen's ladies wished to enroll themselves in the "Charity." The Duchess of Liancourt and the Marchioness of Maignelay* asked for Daughters for the schools at Liancourt and Nanteuil; † St. Vincent wanted them for the service of the prisoners; Mme. Goussault had sent others into her domain at Anjou, and the niece of the Cardinal-minister wished for one to aid her in her private good works. The company was still young and scarcely formed, and already it seemed a providential benefit necessary to the age. Mlle. Le Gras was absent from Paris when the Duchesse d'Aiguillon addressed St. Vincent. Full of gratitude for her pious liberality, and of admiration for her virtue, the Saint thought he could not refuse her desire, and was about to send her Sister Marie-Denyse; but the latter excused herself, saying that as she left her father and mother to serve the poor for the love of God, she could not change her intention and go to

* Marguerite de Gondy, sister of the General of the Galleys and of the archbishop of Paris, married at the age of sixteen, in 1588, Florimon d'Hallin, Marquis of Maignelay. Her husband was assassinated in 1591. She then renounced the world to give herself to works of the most delicate, most heroic charity. Henry IV. called her "the good marquise." Intimate with Mme. Acarie, she had met Michel de Marillac, of whom she said that for him the day was longer than twenty-four hours. She wished to enter the Capuchins, but the Pope (Paul V.) would not allow her. She died Aug. 25, 1650. ("La vie admirable de très haute dame Charlotte, Marguérite de Gondy, Marquise de Maignelais." Paris, 1666.)

† Nanteuil, eighteen kilometres south-east of Senlis, now in the Department of L'Oise.

serve this grand lady. St. Vincent then sent for Sister Barbara Angiboust, who at first consented in tears; but she was scarcely installed at the Luxembourg than he saw her running back affrighted. In consternation at seeing herself in a grand court, she begged him to take her from it. "Our Lord," she said like Marie-Denyse, "had given her to the poor; she wished to serve them only, and to be sent back to them." "What think you of that?" wrote St. Vincent to Mlle. Le Gras, when relating this occurrence. "Are you not delighted to see the spirit of God strong in these poor girls, and the contempt with which it inspires them for the world and its greatness? You cannot believe the courage it gives me for the success of the Confraternity." Barbara was then, according to her expression, given back to the poor, and soon found in the task assigned her means to devote herself conformably to her attraction.

The priests of the Mission, a short time established at Richelieu, where the Cardinal had given them a house, had just founded there a Confraternity of Charity, and asked for two Sisters to keep the school and assist the ladies who were nursing the victims of an epidemic then raging in the country. Barbara Angiboust, who was particularly skilful in bleeding and preparing remedies, was sent with another Sister called Louise. The journey from Paris to Poitou was a long one in those times, and Richelieu was the most distant mission of the Sisters; consequently the benediction and written advice given by St. Vincent

at their departure partook of the solemnity and pathos of a father's farewell to a child going away perhaps never to return. First, he begged our Lord to give them a share in the spirit of the holy women who accompanied Him on earth and co-operated with Him in assisting the poor and instructing children. He then congratulated them on going to continue the charity that Jesus Christ practised on earth. When he saw the two Sisters in the carriage he exclaimed, "Who would say that they are departing for a work that the Son of God found worthy of himself ! How Heaven will rejoice ! What reward they shall have in the next life ! How they can raise their heads on the judgment-day." He gave them as their model on the road, and for all their actions, the Most Holy Virgin. They were to see her often before them or beside them, and do as they might imagine she would do, being always humble, cordial with each other, beneficent to every one and a disedification to no one, holding pious discourse, but not with worldings,—and to be firm as a rock against any familiarity that men might seem to desire. In fine, he pointed out the way they should walk when at Richelieu. Their first care should be to go and salute the Blessed Sacrament, and receive their orders from the Superior of the Priests of the Mission. As soon as they were settled, they should immediately practise their rule, honor the lady officers of Charity, whose zeal they would reanimate, striving to gain the souls of the poor by caring for their bodies." Continu-

ing this way, from poor girls they would become great queens." * Fortified by these counsels, Barbara and her companion set out, Oct. 1, 1638. They had for provision fifty livres. This was little, for the carriage to Tours alone had already cost them twenty-four; but they carried with them those promises which are still sufficient to guide and conduct the Sisters of Charity to the extremities of the earth.

Whilst her Daughters were thus extending themselves afar, Mlle. Le Gras saw labor multiplying around her. Thanks to her energy a new work arose in Paris, the benefit of which is not exhausted after two centuries. During this era of regeneration every misery seemed to find a counterpoise in the charity of Mlle. Le Gras or St. Vincent. The evil in question was deeply rooted in Paris. It appeared from the police report that in the city and its suburbs from three to four hundred children were abandoned every year. Those found lying in the streets were sent to Port St. Landry,† to a house known as the "Couche," where a widow had the charge of them. But there was sufficient pay for two nurses only, and most of the children died of hunger. Often, when weary listening to their cries,

* Letter 324, placed by mistake, we believe, in 1641. The date which we have adopted as that of the departure of Barbara and Louise was given in Letter 214.

† Port St. Landry was on the right bank of the Seine, near the bridge connecting the Ile Notre Dame with the city.

the widow or her servants put them to sleep with laudanum,* or got rid of them by selling them for 15 or 20 cents † to women who substituted them for children dying through their carelessness, or to beggars who made use of them to excite the pity of the passers-by. It was also said that some of the little creatures had been strangled for magical purposes, ‡ or to furnish blood-baths for wretches more wicked than sick. For fifty years not a single child, according to the testimony of St. Vincent,§ survived its infancy, except perhaps a few whose presence in families was a permanent lie; and all probably died without baptism, as the poor widow had never baptized, nor had any else to baptize, a single child.] M. Vincent, hearing through Mlle. Le Gras of this extremity, felt bound to apply a remedy, when one evening, returning from a mission, he found under the walls of Paris a vile beggar striving to cripple a child that he was going to use for exciting public commiseration. "Ah, barbarian," cried St. Vincent, "in the distance I mistook you for a man!" and he snatched the child from him and carried it off in his arms.

From that day he resolved on the work of the

* Discourse of St. Vincent to the Ladies of Charity.

† Sometimes they were sold for eight cents.

‡ Sorcery was much practised in Paris at this time. Magical characters and books were sold even at the very doors of the churches. M. Olier on taking possession of the parish of St. Sulpice found there an altar dedicated to Beelzebub.

§ St. Vincent to the Ladies of Charity assembled July 11, 1657.

| Abelly, p. 142.

foundling children. After long reflection and prayer he told his thoughts to the ladies of the Hôtel-Dieu, asking their assistance. These ladies visited the house called the "Couche," where they were deeply affected by the sight which there met their eyes. They at once resolved to adopt twelve of the children, whom Mlle. Le Gras offered to take care of by her Daughters. Twelve little orphans, chosen by lot, were therefore installed in a house near the church of St. Landry* and confided to the care of the Daughters of Charity, who fed them with the milk of a goat and a cow; but soon this was found not to agree with them, and they were taken to another house, Rue des Boulangers,† near the gate St. Victor, where four nurses were hired for them. The ladies of the Hôtel-Dieu only furnished maintenance and provided the temporalities for these little creatures. On Mlle. Le Gras devolved the care of directing her Daughters, the nurses, and the children they were going to bring up.

"This is the work arising from the removal of the children," St. Vincent wrote to Mlle. Le Gras, and begged her to draw up a rule for the organization of the new establishment. At first this was confined to the ladies in office assembled at Mme. Goussault's, but afterwards it was transformed into a part of the

* In the city, not far from Notre Dame

† The Rue des Boulangers is still in existence, between Rue Cardinal-Lemoine then called Fossés-Saint-Victor, and Rue Jussieu, which has partly taken the place of Rue St. Victor.

rule and given in charge to one of the first co-laborers of Mlle. Le Gras. This was Mme. Pelletier, a widow of rank.* St. Vincent placed this lady at the head of the house, with the title of Governess, directing her to render a strict account of all that transpired to Mlle. Le Gras every eight, or at most every fifteen, days. Mlle. Le Gras was to remain there some time to give the first start to the work, to secure good order and regulate expenses.†

Little by little, as their resources multiplied, the number of children was to be increased. In choosing the children they were obliged to draw lots, as at first, lamenting that all could not be taken, as those who were not favored by the lots seemed condemned to certain death.

At the same time, there were others more to be pitied than even those left at the "Couche," because exposed to more immediate danger; viz., the poor little waifs who were lying in gutters or on the church-steps, waiting often until death arrived before the tardy watchman. Should not this evil be remedied?

* Letter 83. Note p. 104.

† The budget traced by her on this occasion amounted to 2121 livres 16 sols, and contained the most minute details, which may be read with interest. The rent of the house itself, 300 livres. For wood, 400 livres; 3 sols, 6 deniers worth of meat daily (viz., 268 livres per year) and 3 sols worth of bread are assigned to the nurses, while for the Governess and Sisters 2 sols of bread and as much meat. The salt would cost 111 livres, 16 sols; wine, 42 livres, 10 sols. The keeping of the nurses is fixed at 8 crowns. In fine, everything is arranged with such exactitude as attests the order and forethought of Mlle. Le Gras.

St. Vincent thought it should, and every night he went through the purlieus of the city gathering into the folds of his cloak the little beings whose life or death was a matter of indifference to the wretched characters who were sole occupants of the streets at that hour. The Saint's cloak is still preserved. The Saint was well known and allowed to pass everywhere. One night darker than usual he was stopped by some of these wretches; but the moment they heard Vincent's name they fell at his feet and asked his blessing.

The memory of this old man, braving the darkness and often the rigors of winter, and his Daughters, becoming the visible angels of that great city, has triumphed over the forgetfulness of time and still lives in the hearts of the Parisians. The artist and the poet have contributed to render it immortal. Even legend, which usually grows around the blemishes of mankind, here is found to be engrafted on the truth. Such is probably the origin of a sort of journal quoted by several writers in which the Sisters of Charity, especially those of the Foundlings, have written the most memorable events recorded in their annals. Some of these writings are charming, representing at one time the streets covered with snow, and the Sisters on watch as the night wears on; at another time it is St. Vincent coming in at eleven o'clock, benumbed with cold, carrying two babies with tears freezing on their little cheeks; again it is a touching description of the poor deserted children, one six days old perhaps,

another already weaned, or a third with a frightful mark on the little arm. Farther on we see the Saint lavishing all sorts of attention on them, or shedding tears as they fly from his arms to heaven. But whatever resemblance of sentiment there may be between this document and the truth, neither the style nor many of the facts related could warrant us in supposing it authentic, as there is no trace of it in the archives of the Mission nor in any traditions of the Daughters of Charity. We could not pass it over in silence, however, as many authors* have used it as reference; but it is not worthy of any more space in a story beautiful enough to dispense with fiction.

Notwithstanding the sympathy widely elicited, the work progressed slowly. As late as 1640 it had but fourteen hundred livres a year of certain revenue, and the number of children was constantly increasing. Not being able to shelter all the children in the house Rue des Boulangers, Mlle. Le Gras was obliged to give a portion of them to be nursed by women outside. A note in which the writing of St. Vincent is mingled with that of Mlle. Le Gras gives us the names and nurse-places of children received in March and April 1640, with the names of their adopted mothers. Most of these are countrywomen in the

* This journal has been quoted among others by M. Maynard in his "Histoire de St. Vincent de Paul;" by Martin Doisy in the "Dictionnaire d'Economie Charitable;" and for the first time, we think, in the "Vie de St. Vincent," par Capefigue (Paris, 1827, p. 67): he says he saw it, without telling us where or any more about it.

neighborhood of Paris, some of them wives of tradesmen belonging to the Faubourg St. Victor and other quarters of the city, as the wife of a locksmith at the bridge of St. Landry, or of a sculptor in Rue des Moulins, near new St. Honoré. As to the children, they sometimes had a family name; more frequently they were known by the name received from a mother who would never abandon them—their baptismal mother. Joined to this we find sometimes a remembrance of the day they were taken—as, Jane of the Resurrection; or of some peculiarity that would help to distinguish them—as, Charles the Gentleman. These are minute details which have been quoted thousands of times, and which we only mention on account of the interest attaching always to the beginning of a great work.

Mlle. Le Gras had lovingly adopted this unexpected little family, and already found a part of her recompense in the promise that St. Vincent made: "She to whom our Lord has given so much charity for the children of others will merit a special care from our Lord for her own." This means that "little Michel" (as the Saint always called him) was at that very time a subject of great anxiety to his mother. From his infancy she had offered him to God. She had placed him in the Seminary of St. Nicolas, hoping to see him embrace the sacerdotal state, as his disposition all along had seemed to incline him that way; but "either God did not will his early resolve to become an ecclesiastic, or the world opposed it," she wrote

afterward; his fervor diminished, his ideas were changed; and after consulting the Superior of the Visitation, she had taken him from the Seminary, leaving him to board with M. Bourdoise. This change was not for the better, and she finally sent him to the Jesuits. Intelligence was not wanting to Michel, and a letter of thanks he wrote to the Superior of St. Nicolas made St. Vincent "hope that some day the child would have sense."

This child had become a man, however, and he must choose some profession; hence maternal anxiety was redoubled. At the close of a retreat under the direction of the Mission priests* he seems to have recovered his first fervor and resumed the idea of becoming an ecclesiastic, and the following year actually commenced the study of theology. St. Vincent gave him hospitality at the Collège des Bons-Enfants and congratulates Mlle. Le Gras, praying that "God might give the son as great zeal to labor for the salvation of souls as He had given to the mother, poor and miserable though she be." But two months had scarcely passed when Michel began again to hesitate. He was tired of the life he led, and wanted to leave Paris. The Saint, after some resistance, finally consented. As for Louise, all her anguish revived. He wrote to her: "If all who are away from their parents were in danger of being lost, where would I be?" "Remember that everything works together for the good

* M. Robert de Sergis, born in 1608, received at the Mission 1628, ordained priest 1632.

of the predestined."* He allowed the young man to accompany the missionaries to Montlhéry; but seeing that he was not studying nor fitting himself for anything, Vincent thought of sending him to the bishop of Riez,† his relative, "that, being occupied in something, idleness, the mother of all vice, might not prevail over him."‡

All this evasion annoyed Mlle. Le Gras without abating her patience or the consolation given her by St. Vincent. "I know you support with patience the trial caused by your son," he wrote to her. "Who would bear with the child if not the mother? and whose province is it to give each one a place but God's?"§ "He wished to help him to take a resolution, but not to influence him in a decision of such importance that God alone must inspire it." The Saint then recommends her to think of the mother of Zebedee's children, to whom our Lord said, when she petitioned for the establishment of her children, "You know not what you ask."||

About the time of which we speak Michel renounced entirely the long-cherished idea of being a priest. Mlle. Le Gras thought this "a proof of the judgment of God against her," and she was so afflicted that the Saint had to use all his persuasion to bring peace to her soul. We find him in his letters conjuring her to combat these thoughts which

* Letter 143.

† Louis Doni d'Attichy, bishop of Riez, transferred to Autun 1653.

‡ Letter 241. § Letter 241. || Letter 238.

come from the evil spirit. "I never saw such a woman as you, nor one who insists so much that certain things are criminal. Remember that the sins of the children are not always imputed to their parents, especially when these latter give them good example and instruction as you have done, thank God! Our Lord permits the most holy parents to have their hearts crushed. Abraham was afflicted by Ismael, Isaac by Esau, Jacob by the majority of his sons, David by Absalom, Solomon by Roboam, and the Son of God himself by Judas." "By the grace of God you have not come to that. Weep not for the happiness of your little Michel. But, you will tell me, it is in the cause of God I weep. It is not for God you afflict yourself, if it is an affliction to serve Him."

Unfortunately we are not in possession of the letters of Mlle. Le Gras, but we see by those of St. Vincent what was the state of her mind for a long time on account of her son. He returns continually to "those too tender thoughts which are against reason, and exaggerated sacrifices which are against God, who wishes mothers to sacrifice *part* of their goods for their children, but not to deprive themselves of everything." Ever and anon he insists that "the little tendernesses and amusements" which she had not yet given up were excessive. "You have more affection than any mother I know. I never saw a mother so much of a mother as you are. This is the only thing in which you are a real woman. In the

name of God, leave your son to the care of his heavenly Father, who loves him better than you; or at least put away this eagerness."

Was there, in fact, an excess which Louise perceived not in this affection? We do not decide this question, although we coincide with the opinion of Ven. Mother Madeleine of St. Joseph, when, in opposition to the ideas of her time, she wrote to the biographer of Michel de Marillac:* "It is desirable that the biographers of Saints would not omit, as they do, their little weaknesses and imperfections, so that those who see themselves encumbered by the like miseries may not be discouraged and deterred from aiming at sanctity." If we throw light on this weak point in Mlle. Le Gras, we mean neither to blame nor yet to make a merit of sentiments so purely natural. We only wish to point out the courage necessary for a nature like hers to endure the almost constant absence of a son so well beloved, and to show once for all the difference between detachment and want of affection.

We see another proof of her tenderness of heart in her affection for Mme. Goussault. God heard the prayer of St. Vincent and united these two hearts. "Oh, what good company!" the Saint would exclaim when he saw them together. He advised Louise to put aside her serious expression in the company of her friend, and when they could not visit, being sick, each was to send word to the other.

* Lefèvre de Lazeau.

Their health, indeed, was very uncertain. Mme. Goussault was not any stronger than Louise. Within thirteen years she had borne ten children, and in the spring of 1639 she rapidly declined. "I am in trouble about Mme. Goussault," wrote St. Vincent, July 14 of the same year; and in another letter, "She has been bled; it is a double tertiary fever." The sickness was serious, but the submission of the sick one to the Divine Will was absolute. Calm and firm, she elicited the admiration of all who approached her. "It was nothing to see her in health," said St. Vincent; "you ought to see her in sickness." Nor was he ignorant that Mme. Goussault had adopted and practised for a long time, with extreme exactitude, several of the rules imposed by him on the Sisters of Charity. In the midst of her sufferings she thought of these holy Sisters, expressed a wish that they would always remain faithful to their vocation, recommended them to Mme. Segnier, wife of the Chancellor of France,* and on the morning of the day she died she said again to St. Vincent, "My mind was occupied all night with your good Daughters. Oh, if you could only know all the good I believe of them, or the great things God has shown me in regard to them."†

* Letter of Mlle. Le Gras to Mme. Segnier, addressed to Madame la Chancelière, March 1655.

† Conference of St. Vincent to the Daughters of Charity, Jan. 22, 1645. Mme. Goussault was interred in her chapel at St. Gervais, Sept. 22, 1639. (Library Nat., Cab. of Titles, 1379.)

Her death was a subject of mourning for the whole company. Mlle. Le Gras wished the absent also to partake in the sorrow. Some weeks after she sent word to Sisters Barbara and Louise at Richelieu,* telling them of their great loss and recalling the devotion of Mme. Goussault to their work. She presented the imitation of her virtues as a duty of gratitude and a means of glorifying God.

She felt herself bound to discharge a legacy. One of the last wishes of her friend was to procure for the sick in St. John's Hospital,† Angers, in which she was especially interested, the same advantage as those of the Hôtel-Dieu, viz., to establish among the ladies of the village the custom of regular visiting, and to introduce after them the Daughters of Charity.‡

Knowing the services rendered to the sick by the Daughters of Charity, the administrators of the hospital, called "poor masters or fathers," were not less desirous to see them in their hired infirmaries, and the whole town of Angers united in the wish of Mme. Goussault, to which both St. Vincent and Mlle. Le Gras were moreover well disposed to consent. It was decided that Louise should go to Angers to confer with the administrators and prepare,

* Oct. 26, 1639.

† This hospital was founded, 1160, by Henry II., King of England and Count of Anjou, in expiation of the murder of Thomas à Becket. It has been recently transformed into a museum.

‡ Nat. Arch., s. 6160.

if need were, for the installation of her Daughters. But she was not well; the bad weather was just beginning, and the pestilence was breaking out in the country. Nothing daunted, she set out in a coach for Orleans, where she embarked on the Loire, Nov. 1639. After a halt at Saumur, whence she wrote to St. Vincent, begging him to look after her son in her absence, she reached Angers towards the 1st of December, and was received by the Abbé Vaux,* vicar-general of the diocese, from whom she accepted hospitality. Exhausted by her two weeks' journey,† she very soon, unfortunately, fell sick.

This news soon reached the capital, and the greatest anxiety was felt in the little community at La Chapelle and by the ladies at the Hôtel-Dieu. "They pray for you all over Paris," St. Vincent writes; "every one is interested in your health; you cannot believe to what extent the feeling goes." In another letter he writes: "Oh, how I wished our Lord would let you see the affliction of the ladies at the Hôtel-Dieu when they heard the news!"

The sickness of Louise continued through part of the month of January; but she did not wait for her health to attend to business. She sent first, through Mme. Turgis, for Sister Barbara Toussainte of

* Gui Lanier, Abbé de Vaux, "was a great servant of God," according to the expression of St. Vincent de Paul. He was always devoted to the Daughters of Charity, and kept up an active correspondence with Mlle. Le Gras on the subject of charity.

† Letters addressed to the Daughters of Charity at La Chapelle.

Suresne and Sister Clemence Ferre, originally from Lorraine, Dec. 22, 1639. She then proposed to the ladies of Angers to undertake the work accomplished in Paris, and set herself to find out the reform necessary to be made in the house. The support of the hospital and its management left much to be desired. Order and cleanliness were at fault; for example, the vessels were allowed to be washed in the wards; there was not sufficient linen,* and the sick were not willing to come there for treatment. Hence Mlle. Le Gras, after three months' attentive examination of the affairs, decided to accept the proposition, which the administrators wrote and signed Feb. 1, 1640. This deed—in which St. Vincent had authorized her to take the title of Directress of the Daughters of Charity, Servants of the Sick Poor of Hospitals and Parishes—was to serve as the model for many others. We may give a rapid sketch of it here, and admire the perfect balance established in a matter so delicate between the rights and duties of each, as well as the prudence with which she stipulates for the liberties of her Daughters while recommending them to be deferential.

The Daughters of Charity (this article reads) shall always remain subject to the Superior-General of the Mission, and no one is to hinder them from the practice of their rule, which nevertheless obliges them to leave everything when the service

* There were but three dozen chemises for thirty or forty sick.
(Arch. Nat., s. 6160.)

of the poor requires them. In what concerns temporalities they shall be under the authority of the administrators, and obey them exactly; but they alone shall have charge of the poor, without the interference of any one.

They shall be maintained in health and sickness at the expense of the hospital; make no change in the material, color, or form of their dress; and they shall be treated as belonging to the place and not as mercenaries. They shall not be obliged to sit up with the sick out of the hospital. They shall render account of service only to the administrators; the latter considering that if not supported by them, in regard to the poor and servants, the Sisters cannot do the good desired, will therefore uphold them with their authority, and never tell them in public of a fault, but notice such in private, and with the grace of God it will be corrected.

In case of the death of a Sister, the administrators, considering that she is consecrated to the service of God and the poor, will permit her companions to inter her decently according to their usual custom.

Finally, understanding the necessity of preventing the difficulties that might arise between the Congregation of the Mission and the administrators of the hospital, the foundress wished to insert a special article that would establish the rights of the two authorities. The Superior-General of Paris could change the Sisters when he judged it necessary. On their side, the administrators could

ask, at the expense of the hospital, for the change of a Sister with whom they were not satisfied, after having tried her a year or two, and after giving timely notice to the Superior-General.

As to the particular rule for the Daughters drawn up by Mlle. Le Gras before she left Paris, it contained a synopsis of the kind of life and exercises of piety "suitable to the little company." We shall notice here only that which relates to their duty of sick-nurse.

Having risen at four o'clock in the morning, they shall at six o'clock, after taking a little bread and a taste of wine, or, on Communion days, a smell of vinegar, betake themselves to those whom they shall always consider as their lords (since our Lord is in them), make their beds, put the wards in order, and give the medicines or the breakfast. During the day they shall take great care that the sick have all they need; viz., their medicine or nourishment at fixed hours, a drink when thirsty, or some pastiles sweet and soothing for the mouth. They shall stop when near them, instruct them meekly on the principal truths of faith, solicit them to make a general confession, and receive the Blessed Sacrament every Sunday as long as that will be possible for them, and to receive Extreme Unction as soon as they are in danger. They shall console the dying, and suggest good resolutions to the convalescent.

They shall take care that all the sick are in bed at

seven o'clock, and have a little wine or something for the night. Before leaving them they shall help to make the examen of conscience for those who are able, reading the points aloud in the middle of the infirmary; finally, after the Litany, the Superioress will give holy water to the Sisters and the sick. At eight o'clock they shall retire, leaving one of their number to watch and assist those who need. The Sister sitting up shall make her prayer beside the sick, remembering, as well as the one who shall come to take her place, that all the care they bestow on the sick is a continual prayer before God. In order that it may please God to give them grace to do all this, they shall take as special protectors the Holy Virgin, St. Joseph, St. Louis, St. Genevieve, St. Marguerite, Queen of Scotland, and St. John the Evangelist, patron of the hospital; they shall write often to their Superiors in Paris; they shall read every Friday, at table, the present rule.*

The establishment of the Daughters of Charity at Angers was a noteworthy fact. To this time, with the exception of La Chapelle, they had only precarious positions; nothing permanent in their residence and no independence of action. In the different quarters of Paris they occupied only rooms in the place. Above all, in the parishes, like at the Hôtel-Dieu and in the country, the Sisters were subject to the Ladies of Charity, who paid their board and lodging,

* National Arch., s. 6160.

and to whom they were obliged to show great deference. At Angers, on the contrary, although the temporal administration of the hospital did not belong to them, they would have an active part in its beginning and responsibilities, and the arrival of three new companions, making their number eight*—the highest yet attained in any one place—permitted them to observe with regularity the exercises of community life. This foundation commenced then under the happiest auspices, and the public calamities which occurred soon after convinced those who were still doubting of the benefits resulting from it. The pestilence was not slow to break out in the hospital; perhaps it was already there when the Sisters took charge:† but they braved the contagion heroically, and the plague seemed to respect them. This was for them a baptism of fire; they came from it conquerors, having gained the right of land, so to speak, from city to city, and from Heaven the grace

* The eight Daughters of Charity near whom Mme. Turgis had to remain during part of the following summer were Elizabeth Martin, Superioress, native of Argenteuil; Cecil Agnes Angiboust, from the diocese of Chartres; Marie Matrilomeau, of Poissy; Marguerite Françoise, of St. Nicolas in Lorraine; Barbara Toussainte, of Suresne; Clémence Ferre, of La Champinière, near Nancy; Madeleine Mouget, of Sucy in Brie; and Genevieve Caillou, of St. Germaine in Laye. (Nat. Arch., s. 6160.)

† “The Sisters of Angers,” said St. Vincent, “entered the hospital of that city when infected with contagion; they treated the plague-stricken like the others, and the pest respected them.” (Conference Oct. 16, 1641.)

to do the good which Mlle. Le Gras was happy to set on foot in many places. "The Daughters of Angers," she said many years after, "have a special gift of God for the service of the sick poor in the hospitals. *

To return to herself. After still some weeks with the Abbé Vaux, she set out for Paris,† where her presence became necessary, not only for her Daughters, but for the general business of charity.‡ In obedience to St. Vincent, she did not travel this time by water, but accepted her host's carriage as far as Tours. There she hired a conveyance to Orleans, and made the rest of the journey in the public coach. She had given to Angers the choice of her flock,§ but she picked up several young country girls who offered themselves to enter the company. It is the property of charity never to impoverish, and the characteristic of religious families to enrich themselves by the practice of this virtue.

* Letters of Mlle. Le Gras to Sister Madeleine (1645) and to Sisters Claude and Naire (Nov. 28).

† Fevrier 26, 1640.

‡ Lettres de St. Vincent.

§ Letter of Mlle. Le Gras to the Abbé Vaux, dated, La Chapelle, March 23, 1640.

CHAPTER IX.

1641.

Mlle. Le Gras is established at the Foundling Asylum St. Denis—
Her Interior Life, from her Writings and the Souvenirs of the first
Sisters—Interior Combats and Victories—Her Humility, and Charity
for her Daughters.



ER JOURNEY and the severe sickness she had just gone through had greatly and forever shattered the frail constitution of Mlle. Le Gras. According to St. Vincent, she lived from that time "contrary to all human appearance,"* and by "a continual miracle granted to her faith." "I felt strengthened by the obedience which made me act," she wrote. "It seems to me that God will give me health as long as I believe He can do it, remembering the faith which made St. Peter walk on the water, and acting without any contribution from myself, and with much consolation in the thought that God wills me (unworthy as I am) to help my neighbor to know him."

Notwithstanding the ruin of her health, the twenty years she had still to run were perhaps the most fruitful portion of her life. Forgetting the excess of her own suffering and the danger still threatening her † (she had to be assisted by others), yet she main-

* Letter of St. Vincent, March 3, 1660.

† Letter to the Abbé Vaux, May 26, 1640.

tained a constant correspondence with the Daughters at Richelieu and Angers and the Abbé Vaux, who, entrusted with their spiritual direction, showed for them an indulgence which she thought a little too lenient. "You tell me nothing but good of them," she writes. "Do not fear to let me know their faults as well." We notice the most affectionate solicitude in every page of her letters. At one time she is all anxiety concerning the trouble arising between the Sisters and the administrators of St. John's Hospital, "the administrators pretending that the Sisters wish to gain the whole thing." At another time she complains of their silence or is uneasy about their health. Sister Elizabeth is sick; immediately she is in alarm. "I am in need of her. I think with the advice of the doctor as regards her strength, you had better send her to me; but the remains of my sickness will not permit me to write more." * To the sick one she writes: "How I sympathize in your pains! Write to me frankly about them; I shall read and understand them all. Have great courage; God will draw His glory from your misery. It is my consolation, when I see myself, as I often am, under the correcting hand of God, to think that I can serve as an example to deter others from offending God as I have done, by showing them that He knows where to find those who have opposed His will and are debtors to His justice." †

* We have nearly one hundred letters from Mlle. Le Gras to the Abbé Vaux.

† Letter to Sister Elizabeth Martin, July 5, 1641.

But correspondence was not half her occupation, and in La Chapelle, as in Paris, her work was always growing. She found on her return from Angers young girls from Lorraine whom St. Vincent had sent to her house for protection from the war, then desolating the province. She provided for the establishment of some, and others wished to enter her community. This latter ceased not to increase; recruits for it arrived from all parts, commencing already to realize the truth of Scripture so applicable to the community to this day—"I shall call you from all the nations of the earth." St. Vincent says, "And God, seeing the Daughters acquitting themselves of their duty so well, was not slow in varying the nature and multiplying the number of their employments." The expansion of their labor caused daily more frequent intercourse with externs, who took active part in the work; for we must remember that the Daughters of Charity continued to form one family, so to speak, with the ladies, and could not subsist without their help. Hence the house in La Chapelle soon became not only too small, but too far from the centre of Paris, and too difficult of access, especially in winter, when the rain turned the roads into swamps.* Mlle. Le Gras thus decided once more to change her residence, in 1641; but the trouble experienced five years before was now spared her.

* Even the post did not always venture out, and letters from Angers to Louise were addressed under cover to her son, who was then at the Collège des Bon Enfants.

St. Vincent had just bought from two citizens of Paris, Jean Desmaret and Claud Sadot, a house situated in the Faubourg St. Denis and almost opposite St. Lazarus, which he offered to rent to her. She accepted eagerly, and was soon in possession.*

The parish of Saint Laurent, where Mlle. Le Gras founded the new establishment, was one of the poorest and most extensive of Paris, composed for the most part of vacant lots and obscure lanes, where a whole population sought refuge, driven backward by misery from the centre to the extremities of the city.

With the authorization of the head teacher of Notre Dame, who had charge of the little schools of the city and suburbs, Mlle. Le Gras soon opened a free class, where she had the young girls of the *Quartier St. Lazare* instructed in grammar and other

* This house, which remained the Mother-house until the Revolution, consisted of three suites of rooms adjoining one another,—one of these was newly built,—a court, stable, wells, garden, and a place newly paved in front, out to the paving of the street. Some years later, thanks to a legacy of Mme. Goussault, Mlle. Le Gras was able to purchase it, for 17,050 livres, to which she added 800 for a little corner-piece of land along the new Rue St. Laurent. The contract was made April 1, 1653, in presence of N. Laisant, the notary of Chalet, and preserved in the Nat. Arch. (6160.) It was signed by Mlle. Le Gras, Srs. Francis, Germaine Poisson, Julienne Loret, Louise Christine Ridé, Mathurine Guerin, Marie Tournot, and Marguerite of Vienne. Confiscated in 1793, the house was sold in 1797, and on the site of the demolished chapel were opened Faith and Charity streets. Later it became an infirmary for Dr. Dubois, and disappeared altogether to make way for the Boulevard Magenta.

branches of learning.* This was the beginning of a work to which the company attached itself more every day, but which had not been attempted before, except by those in the neighboring villages.†

What would have been the joy of that foundress had it been given her to foresee the number of schools throughout that immense capital which, in spite of every obstacle, thousands of children are attending to-day!

Apart from this modest commencement to a great work, with some visits, more and more rare, to the neighboring "Charities," a cordial meeting with Mme. de Chantal,‡ reminding us of St. Francis and St. Dominic, and a pilgrimage to Chartres§ for the

* We still possess the text of the petition addressed by Mlle. Le Gras on this occasion to the *grand chantre* or *écolâtre*, of Notre Dame, Michel le Masle, Seigneur des Roches de Saint Paul; the authorization granted by him, dated May 29, 1641; and a little easy catechism of questions and answers, composed by Mlle. Le Gras, probably destined for that school, over which she held special direction.

† "You ought to instruct yourselves," said St. Vincent to the Daughters of Charity, "that you may be capable of teaching the young girls; you must do this very carefully, for it is one of the designs you had in view when giving yourselves to God:" (Conference of April 16, 1641.)

‡ Mme. de Chantal came to Paris during the summer of 1641, and left in the month of November for Moulins, where she died Dec. 13, the same year.

§ In 1644, probably. The pilgrimage to Chartres was then in great devotion at Paris. This was the period in which M. Olier received such signal grace in Chartres, which circumstance gave rise to the veneration always professed for this ancient sanctuary by the company of St. Sulpice.

purpose of recommending to the Holy Virgin the wants of the company and the still undecided future of her son, there is nothing to attract attention during the first years of Mlle. Le Gras in the Faubourg St. Denis. For the community this was a period of formation ; for her, a time of silence and interior life ; and for us, alas ! “ the garden enclosed ” of our history. Yet while we regret our inability to admire these hidden treasures ignored even by herself, these acts of heroic charity which noiselessly marked her every-day life, we are happy to catch some lineaments of this spiritual physiognomy from numerous notes left by her and still unpublished, and which date, in part at least, at this epoch. These are meditations, souvenirs of retreat at Pentecost (her own feast-day), reflections proper for a solemnity, a pilgrimage, or counsels addressed to “ her dear Sisters ”—a title she extended to every soul aspiring to perfection by divine love. They are written as the pen ran along—no order, no connection one with another ; but we find in them a large-minded, simple devotion, the enemy of “ little practices which serve to amuse and are nothing when compared to solid virtue, a firm judgment, and an elevated mind (perhaps a little subtle) which had been well strengthened and nourished by profound reading.” Her thoughts naturally fly to the heights. The plan of God in creating the world, embracing the Incarnation outside the fall of man ; Christian life united to the sublime order of the universe, and

which leads the soul, by mortification, to the purity of paradise—these seemed among the subjects preferred for her contemplation. But the principal idea—the motherly idea which runs all through—is that of love; not the general love experienced by all predestined souls, but “the love which God expects from cherished souls—those whom He has chosen to practise on earth the purity of charity.” “My Saviour,” she writes in one of those meditations, “what light have I not received on the love you desire from souls chosen to exercise on earth the purity of charity! Behold us a little flock! Could we pretend to it? It seems to me that we have this desire in our heart: O pure Love, how I love you!”

Love is single in His eyes, and has but one object. Reading that Jesus Christ substituted our neighbor for Himself to help our inability to render Him personal service, the thought seemed to penetrate her heart in a most intimate and particular manner. As to the love of God for us, she expresses it thus: “The love of God for our souls proceeds from the knowledge He has of the excellent being He has given them.” “They are an act outside of God, analogous in some sort to that which he produces in Himself by engendering the Second Person of the Divinity. The saints are those who have most loved:” such is the starting-point of her love for them. The salient points of their life, the spirit which animated them, the graces received by them, often furnish abundant food for her meditations. On

St. Fiacre's Day, for example, she contemplates this saint in the moment of his conversion, leaving his kingdom to take the government of another of greater importance, since it is said that "man is a world in abridgment." "Oh, how beautiful to see such a soul ascend to heaven," she exclaims, "and there received by the King of kings in triumph and magnificence as a prince accompanied by his court, viz., his passions which he has conquered!" On the feast-day of St. Denis she rejoiced at the choice God had made of this saint to unite us to the Divinity. "The nothingness of paganism—from that have you drawn France," she said to him; and adds with prophetic instinct, "Obtain for the people whom your blood brought to Jesus Christ that this mountain now smoking may attract the flame of Divine Love! Inflammé our hearts!" Two centuries have passed, and that prayer, hitherto unknown to men, has been heard in heaven; and on Montmartre, the hill of the martyrdom of St. Denis is raised the basilica consecrated to Divine Love.

If in these meditations, as we may judge from these hasty extracts, the thought shifts from one thing to another, the form returns very often to the framework. Sometimes, however, it is a whisper of eloquence all the truer as it is unconscious, passing across the page like the echo of a stronger voice. Such, for example, is this magnificent aspiration to the Most High: "Remove my blindness, Light Eternal; simplify my mind, Perfect Unity. May my self-suffi-

ciency be no barrier to the power of the love Thou hast given to my soul." Such are also the counsels given to her Daughters, which might be mistaken for a fragment of mystic poetry from St. Francis de Sales: "Let not the thorns surrounding the rose prevent you from adorning yourself with this bouquet, since it will render you agreeable to our Lover, of whom the Spouse in the Canticle, she whom we should hold as our Abbess, and who has preceded us in love, has said, 'He is white and ruddy.' Let us preserve His image in us, and resemble Him by these two eminent characteristics of purity and charity represented by the whiteness and vermilion of the rose."

What adds to the interest of these scattered leaves is a number of familiar details which people might find too minute, but which the family would gather up and preserve as relics. They reveal, among other things, divers practices of daily piety suggested to Mlle. Le Gras by her increasing devotion to the hidden life of our Lord, and principally His sojourn in the womb of His Mother. "Hearing this mysterious state spoken of," she writes in the year 1642, a little before Advent, "I applied myself to it with deep reflection, and a new light was given me with a desire to honor this mystery by some appropriate prayers."

It was at this time that she made the resolution of saying a rosary composed of nine grains, in honor of the nine months preceding the birth of the Infant God; and to encourage in her Daughters a taste

for this holy exercise, she prepared for them in a little box as many chaplets as were necessary for each to be given one, to be distributed after her death. Elsewhere we find promises made to the Holy Virgin to draw down her protection on the Missionaries and the Daughters of Charity, whom she never separated in her thoughts, and to obtain the preservation of purity in one and the other company. "Promises accomplished," she writes later, after she had given to Chartres a little Notre Dame, to St. Lazarus a picture of the Blessed Virgin, where is the chaplet of pearls, and to the Mother-house a wooden statue holding the chaplet of nine grains. Elsewhere, again, are noted coincidences which surprise her, where the goodness of God manifests itself, and she breaks out in grateful acknowledgment. She writes it to preserve the remembrance. "St. Benedict's Day," we find written in one place. "I have had a new reason for trusting implicitly in Divine Providence. Deprived of Communion, and being in great sorrow for my sins, I felt an extraordinary desire for Holy Communion, and I asked of God if it were His holy will to let my confessor know it, and he, without hearing from me on the subject, called on me for that purpose, which gave me great consolation." Farther on: "I set out this February 5th from St. Agatha to St. Cloud. It seems to me that our Lord gave me the thought of receiving Him as the Spouse of my soul; and that this Communion was a sort of espousals; and I felt myself more strongly united to Him on this

account, which was extraordinary, as the thought of quitting all to follow Him, and to look upon the difficulties I would encounter, is the proof of my partnership with Him." She adds: "I had a desire to have Mass said to-day, being the anniversary of my marriage, but I held back to make an act of poverty, wishing to be dependent on God in the action I was going to do; but, O delicacy of Divine Providence! on arriving at the altar the priest had the thought to offer it for me as an alms, and it was the Mass of Espousals!"

If we now catch the perfume of piety from these pages, what must have been for her Daughters the sight of their Mother praying and meditating in their midst! That alone was a sermon. Always recollected in the midst of a multiplicity and diversity of business, before the altar she was fixed and immovable. "I saw her," wrote Sister Guerin, "one day that she was too weak to hold herself erect, hearing Mass with her head and hands against the balustrade at St. Lazarus, without movement, as if she were dead;" and when some one complained of some inconvenience preventing their prayer, she said, "You would not have felt it had you a lively faith." She spoke from experience.

The graces God showered on her in prayer—"those particular graces which have all power over the soul that loves"—could not entirely escape the notice of her Daughters. In her instructions to them she appeared transported with love, and often spoke

in bursts of rapture unknown to herself. She was often seen coming from Holy Communion bathed in tears which left their trace a long time on the cloth. She tried to conceal her devotion, but on Fridays, between two and three o'clock P.M., and during Lent, she was sometimes surprised before the crucifix in tears, condemning herself aloud for being the cause of the sufferings, known and unknown, of the Saviour.* This supernatural intensity of sorrow she brought to the confessional, where she accused herself with such vehemence that St. Vincent had all he could do to calm her.

But this was not all her suffering; and this holy soul would not appear in all her beauty did we pass over in silence the interior martyrdom she endured with a courage all the more heroic as it was the more hidden. Without deciding how much nature had to do with her sufferings, to which, no doubt, her distrust of self gave some occasion, we may affirm that she was continually on the rack, except the very last month of her life, when "our Lord," as she said herself, "put her in a state to bear everything in sufficient peace."†

To have an idea of her mental torture we must see her letters to St. Vincent. "There is no anguish like incertitude;" and still she feels herself "full of irresolution and shrouded in darkness." Her mind is

* Written after the death of Mlle. Le Gras by Sister Françoise de Pauli.

† Letter to St. Vincent, January 4, 1660.

"enveloped entirely, so feeble is it." It is the "prey of all sorts of imaginations, vain and frivolous apprehensions, and distrustful thoughts." The reading of the "Memorial" of Grenada caused her one day such fear as pierced her through. It is true, she adds, "the meditation of these words, 'God is who is,' " calmed her. Another time she wrote this familiar note: "St. Thomas's Day. All day great trouble of mind from my own abjection, abandonment, annihilation of self; I seem to myself a sink of pride, abandoned by God, which abandonment I have deserved by my infidelities, with great oppression of heart, causing in moments of violence great physical sufferings." Again, the Tuesday after, being in the same pain: "I see myself a subject of the justice of God; and accepting His ordinance, I felt a little more tranquil, having taken as the subject of prayer 'The peace of God which surpasses all understanding.'" She saw nothing in herself but misery and affliction, hardness and opposition to the grace of God. "O my very dear Father," she exclaimed, "if our good God would let you see me as I am how frightful I would appear to you! I find nothing in myself but crime. The state to which my relaxation, laziness, and infidelity have reduced my soul would make saints tremble. . . . I must appear to them without love. . . . My infidelities give me great fear for the future. . . . I dread lest my past and perhaps my present obstinacy may cause my ruin—miserable that I am!" She feared

that "God being angry would not accept her service any longer; that His mercy would tire of being exercised on a subject always disagreeable to Him; . . . in short, that she would die in impenitence." "I cannot refrain from telling you," she wrote to St. Vincent, "that to-day I am in great affliction on the subject of predestination, caused by some thoughts I have had in prayer. They have oppressed my mind so that I was obliged to make an act of resignation to the designs of God, should I and my son be forever the objects of His justice. . . . Oh, if you could know my fears, what a comfort it would cause me!" She always winds up with "the fear of being abandoned by God, as I fear to have deserved many times." "When I let myself be carried away by my fears, which have the same effect as real afflictions, I ought to be dealt with roughly; . . . but fear, nonsense, or pride prevents me speaking of myself." Notwithstanding, this breaks out through all her effusions: "She would rather die than disobey." But in hours of obscurity the confusion of her thoughts condemn her to silence; she could not make herself known, and she seemed to be without any direction.*

She attributed to herself all the faults committed around her. "The weakness of our Sisters," she wrote to the Abbé Vaux,† "is only the fruit of the poor garden of my wretched cultivation; my sins cause all that, and it seems to me I merit the great-

* Letter to St. Vincent, Nov. 16, 1643.

† Letter, March 10, 1643.

est punishment for all their failings." The death of her Daughters is still another chastisement of her infidelities; and St. Vincent was obliged to tell her that she was treated like the rising Church, against which God must have appeared in anger when He called away her children by martyrdom. She always feared that her work would perish; a fear causing sadness equal to that of Agar in the desert beside her dying boy; yet greater still, as she imagined that her sins caused all the trouble. Sometimes she conceived the desire of being like Jonas cast into the sea to appease the tempest. Her heart all this time was never embittered; she felt that "God draws His glory from such persons, and that His power had no need of their vileness;"* but she avenged herself in abasing and vilifying herself continually; she constantly thirsted for humiliation, and would have performed all the drudgery of the house had her strength permitted. As it was, she served in her turn at table, and washed the dishes of the community. In the weekly conference she was the first to say the *Culpa*. She was seen in the chapel to kiss the feet of her Daughters, or rather of her Sisters, as she would never give them any other title, nor would she receive from them that of *Mother*, which she reserved for the Holy Virgin. In the refectory she asked pardon, either prostrate or standing, with her arms extended. To those who came to tell her their

* Letter to St. Vincent, March 23, 1643.

temptations she confessed to having had the like, and sent for any one to whom she had given pain, even when the other was in fault. She expressed her regret most humbly, and, prostrating with her face to the ground, would insist on the Sister passing over her body. She would then rise bathed in tears. Her chief desire was to be trodden under foot; and the more she was favored by the gifts of God the more she sought to humble herself beneath the feet of all, like magnificent forest-trees which bend their lofty branches all the lower the more they are laden with precious fruit.

Everything around her reflected her sentiments. The resources of the community were restricted. Exact poverty was practised in nourishment, clothing, etc. The table would have been more restricted but for the wants of those whom she always called "our dear masters, our lords, the poor; for being," she said, "their servants, we ought not to be better treated than our masters." In what concerned herself personally she carried this principle so far that St. Vincent wrote to her, "You do not nourish yourself enough; you are the murderer of yourself, from the little care you take of yourself;" and when her health required something different from the other Sisters, it was such torture for her that they had to try all sorts of expedients to gain her consent.

She aspired to such perfect detachment that St. Vincent, in one of his letters, feared not to designate

her by this periphrase worthy of a saint: "She who loves poverty in a sovereign degree."* However, when she asked his permission to give up everything so that she "could only live like the poor,"† he would not allow her. The fortune whose free disposition he obliged her to manage was very limited. It consisted of some property in Auvergne and an income from the Hôtel de Ville, without speaking of unclaimed goods in her ancient dwelling, among them a cabinet from Germany, mentioned in her will, and another large cabinet of wood given her by the Duchess of Liancourt; but this patrimony was so scant that, to pay her own expenses and those of her son, she often accepted the kind assistance of Mme. de Marillac, her cousin.

After the death of M. Le Gras her costume had always been that of widows, who, according to the expression of the time, made profession of being devout, and St. Francis de Sales could not reproach her with putting on what he termed "the sign;" but, little by little, she put off all that appeared to her still savoring of the world. Like all ladies of rank, she ordinarily wore a mask when she went out, and gloves to protect her from the cold, which she felt severely; but she gave them up when she went to Angers,‡ under pretext of getting the benefit of the air. She did not wish new clothes; if they were

* Letter 91.

† See, in Chap. 17, "Conference on the Virtues of Mlle. Le Gras."

‡ M. Almèras writing about Mlle. Le Gras.

brought to her, she did not fail to send them away the moment she perceived that they were new. One day, in winter, a petticoat warmer than hers was left beside her bed, but she refused it, and sent it to Sister Genevieve, who had taken possession of the other one. "What!" she exclaimed, "you to wear my old clothes? You may wear them when I am dead; not before."* The black head-dress or coiffe, then called *capot*, in which her portraits always represent her, she had bought at the broker's. Her cloak had been worn out and patched with different-colored pieces before she could be persuaded to use a piece of serge given her to mend it.

Poor as was this costume, there was nothing common about the one who wore it. Her height was rather above medium; her beauty, marked in the regularity of her features, favored the unconscious dignity and grace of her bearing. "The declared enemy of studied attitudes and constrained postures," simple, gay, cordial, Mlle. Le Gras always appeared the same, seeking to correct what St. Vincent called "*cette petite sériosité*"—air of seriousness—which nature had given her, but which grace had already mitigated, "not fearing occasionally to mingle a little vinegar to the ordinary sweetness of her manner." These efforts were not without merit, above all in the midst of such interior trials; she confessed to one of her Daughters that "often in recreation

* This was told by Sr. Geneviève Caillou to the Daughters of Charity of Pantin.

her heart was so torn she could scarcely open her mouth; yet this was the time she did her best to laugh." Naturally lovely and warm-hearted, she accused herself of too much promptitude. "I commit many faults by that, not counting those of malice;" and she accused herself of speaking loud to hasten affairs when coming or going.* St. Vincent would not see any sin in that, and her Daughters, on the contrary, wondered at the affability with which she always received them, the first to salute, never speaking except in a tone of entreaty, and profuse in her thanks for their services or for the labor attached to their employments, at which they were often confused. No one could complain of being treated with less affection than others. Nevertheless, in the number passing through her hands there were often, as their companions said, rough and ignorant individuals who grumbled and murmured, and took it amiss to be told of their faults. At such times she would pretend to have provoked their displeasure by her rudeness, and excused them, saying it was only a natural defect of their mind, or an excess of frankness preferable to dissimulation. Thus she bore patiently for years with very imperfect Sisters, not allowing herself to despair of their amendment.

She had maternal compassion for those who suffered pains of body or mind. She went to visit

* Notes written during a retreat.

the Sisters who were sick in the parishes, and rose in the night to see those who were in the infirmary; and when her health would not permit her to assist in what she termed her last act of love, she sent, by one of their companions, sweet messages full of tenderness and adieus full of hope. The death of the Sisters was such a grief that the news had to be communicated to her with care, and St. Vincent would write her as he would to a mother weeping for her children, offering her as a model the resigned submission of the Holy Virgin on Calvary.* Everything in her life was one, we may truly say; for, after having drawn all things into one, or into love, by her meditations, she made love the principle of all her actions, giving thus, by her example, the best commentary on the beautiful name whose excellence she set forth in the midst of her Daughters, and showed herself worthy to bear "Daughter of Charity—that is to say, Daughter of God, for God is Charity."†

* Letter 125.

† St. Vincent, Conference Aug. 12, 1640.

CHAPTER X.

1641—1646.

Progress and Constant Development of the Work—Origin of the Title Sister-Servant—First Daughters of Charity authorized to make their Vows—M. Portail is named Director—Establishment of a Council—Accidents and Divine Protection.

THE Daughters of Charity were not as yet formed into a distinct congregation, and therefore had not had any definite rule. Faithful to his custom, St. Vincent, before framing the constitution, wished that practice should prove its wisdom, and, as often happened in his life, experience fully justified what his prudence had inspired. Had the rules been traced out in the commencement of the work, they would only have been adapted to the Sisters visiting the sick in the parishes. But during the ten years just elapsed, the schools, the hospital, the foundlings, and the new mission of assisting the prisoners, had successively been entrusted to them, and hence certain modifications conformable to circumstances, to requirements, and, so to speak, to the whisperings of grace, had been necessary in the first regulations drawn up by Louise; for it was she who prepared everything, matured and conducted it to the end. The little family lived from day to day under the Divine action, and M.

Vincent and Mlle. Le Gras only sought to second the views of Providence, who, without any apparent plan in advance, quietly and sweetly continued the work. A word of St. Vincent in the Conferences, a reflection expressed, often unintentionally, was taken up and little by little became tradition. One day it is a custom that struck him when visiting the Convent, and which he introduces amongst his Daughters. "The Annunciades call their Superior 'Ancelle.' That made me think of you," he said. "Henceforth you also will give no other title to your Superioress than that of Sister-Servant—a glorious title which she shares with the head of the Church, for all pontifical briefs bear this signature: Clement, Leo, etc., Servant of the Servants of Jesus Christ." Another time, 1642—a date which he little deemed so memorable for his company—St. Vincent related the impression made on him by hearing, some days before, the Brothers Hospitaliers pronounce their formula of vows: "I, Brother —, make a vow and promise to God to keep all my life poverty, chastity, obedience, and to serve our lords the poor." "O my Daughters," he added with emotion, "if you knew how agreeable to Jesus Christ is this honor of the poor, His dear members!" In speaking thus he only gave way to the fulness of his heart; but, unknown to him, he was sowing a fertile seed. His words were so penetrating that several Sisters, deeply moved, asked if they also might engage themselves by vow. The Saint did not say against it; and after explaining to them the difference between solemn

and simple vows, he said they might be permitted to contract the latter engagement, which would not make them religious; for when "we say religious, we include the cloister, grating, and things incompatible with their vocation; but these simple vows will not be less sacred for your souls." At the same time he recommended them to be on their guard against acting without permission from their superiors; to be satisfied with making known their desire, whatever would be the decision.

The earth was too well prepared for the seed not to germinate immediately, and several of the Daughters of Charity hastened to ask the desired permission. The authorization was granted for one year to four of their number, and the 25th of March, 1642,* was chosen for the first oblation. This was the anniversary of the day when, eight years previous, Mlle. Le Gras devoted herself to the work. Not willing to separate herself from her Daughters, the Mother renewed her promise with them.† Moreover, all this

* This date is given us in the Conference held in 1659, on the virtues of Barbara Angiboust.

† The archives of the Mission possess a copy of this formula of vows. The last lines are in the writing of Mlle. Le Gras. It runs thus: "I, the undersigned, in the presence of God, renew my promises of baptism, and make a vow of poverty, chastity, and obedience to the Vicar-General of the Priests of the Mission, in the company of the Daughters of Charity, to apply myself all this year to the corporal and spiritual service of the sick poor, our true masters; and this with the help of God, which I ask through his Son Jesus crucified, and by the prayers of the Blessed Virgin."

(Signed) "JEANNE OF THE CROSS."

took place in the silence of their conscience. Disposed for Holy Communion, hearing Mass for that intention, immediately after the elevation of the Sacred Host they contracted with Jesus a secret alliance, which, without being a formal term of engagement, was evidently intended by each to be renewed in perpetuity until the day of their heavenly espousals.

We would like to know more of these oldest of the family, these elect, these four corner-stones of the edifice; but, alas! Barbara Angiboust is the only one whose name or history we have. We know it was she who fled from the Duchess of Aiguillon and begged St. Vincent to give her the happiness of serving the poor. Received by Mlle. Le Gras July 1, 1634, when the little community was still lodging in the Rue Fossés-Saint-Victor, she was one of the oldest and one who best understood the spirit of the company.* She was also, as her companions said, one of the most gifted; her gayety and agreeable manner attracted the ladies to the service of the poor, and the latter to the service of Jesus Christ. As many as sixty women and young girls might sometimes be counted gathered around her to learn the Catechism or the way to make their prayer. Most zealous for the observance of the rule, full of humble deference for St. Vincent and Mlle. Le Gras, whose letters she always read on her knees, Barbara *l'orgueilleuse* (Barbara the proud)—as she always signed

* These details are borrowed from a Conference on the virtues of Sister Barbara. This Conference took place shortly after her death.

herself—possessed every quality necessary for the post assigned her at Richelieu, where we left her; from there she had been recalled to Paris, and sent to the service of the galley-slaves, whom she attended with unalterable meekness and patience. Often these poor creatures threw on the ground the food she brought them; but Barbara picked it up without a word, looked at them as kindly as ever, hindered the guard from striking them, and continued to beg for their wants. From the galleys she went afterwards to the foundlings, and manifested for them the same devoted zeal; holding on her knees all night those for whom she had no room in the cradles. Always ready for everything, an accomplished type of the Sister of Charity, Barbara well merited to be one of the first to consummate her sacrifice and unite herself by vows. But who were her companions? For these we are reduced to simple conjecture, and for one among them we may mention our conjecture here.

“Of the first five whom the Divine Goodness willed to be entirely dedicated to Him, one is in heaven,” wrote Mlle. Le Gras* some years after. This information is very vague; but it is worth something if we connect it with the other notice of Jeanne d’Allemagne, viz., “this is the first deceased of those who gave themselves to God in that way.”†

* To St. Vincent, dated April 4, 1655. It is needless to remark that in writing “five” Mlle. Le Gras included herself.

† Conference on the virtues of Jeanne d’Allemagne, written by Mlle. Le Gras, 1644.

But from the Sister of Suresne, who died of the plague in 1631, to Jeanne d'Allemagne, in 1644, how many Servants of the Poor had already received their heavenly reward! How, then, explain this remark without supposing that Jeanne also formed a part of that privileged group? Besides, she was well worthy of it, for "there was nothing found to reprove in her but an excess in her desire to serve God and apply herself to prayer."* Being at first door-keeper with the Carmelites, in order to become a Sister of Charity she had to conquer the resistance of the Carmelite Mother, who would have made her a choir nun, and the objections of St. Vincent, who was always a little doubtful of Sisters who had been in convents. But her vocation was irresistible. She could be seen at the door of the poor before they were up, and a sort of intuition guided her in her care for the sick. She gave her own meal one day to a beggar in place of a piece of hard crust some one had given him, saying quite simply, "We must give nothing to God but what is good." She died at the age of 32, expressing but one regret—that of not having sufficiently served the poor; but one desire—that of serving them still, if God would give her life; and but one fear—that of having found too much joy in her sufferings.

Thus, according to the testimony of St. Vincent, we find elect souls, and souls truly generous in all

* Conference on the virtues of Jeanne d'Allemagne, written by Mlle. Le Gras, 1644.

the extent of the term, among those poor girls, who often knew not how to read, much less to write, and to whom Mlle. Le Gras was often obliged to teach the *Pater* and *Credo*, article by article, before showing them how to bleed a vein or dress a wound. They were only, as he said, "village girls; God having chosen to form their company from the same material He made use of in founding His Church." But "had they lived in the time of St. Jerome, this great doctor would have written their lives to such advantage that we would have been in admiration of the greatest number among them." "They are the Saints," he would repeat. "What benedictions and what beautiful examples they have left!" Some of them remained quite simple and natural, it is true, like little Sister Marguerite Laurence, who related ingenuously that, having a desire to see the follies of the fair as she was passing, she took hold of her cross and said to God, "You are more beautiful than all that!" And they were all so attached to their vocation that they would rather be crucified or cut in pieces than suffer the least thing that might weaken its spirit. Those who were of good families, "the smaller number at that time," adopted the rules and usages of the company not less courageously than the others. "We have a young lady of good position and accustomed to the best attire, but she makes no objection to changing her dress," writes Mlle. Le Gras.*

* Sr. Marguerite, perhaps, whose mother wrote her an admirable letter about this time—"Such as I would wish to write my daughter,

It was they who edified St. Vincent so much when he met them in the street, carrying the pot of broth or a box of vegetables to the sick, and "with such modest gait," he added, "that when I asked one to whom she had just spoken, 'Sir,' she said, 'I did not take notice.'"

We might multiply these details, but they are only flowers which they scattered by the way; our duty

had I one," said Mlle. Le Gras. We extract the following: "My daughter, I was greatly consoled to hear of your perseverance in the fervor of your resolutions and your joy at changing your wordly garments for the dress of the holy poverty of a slave of Jesus Christ, which will ornament you more than the satin and brocade of the world, if your soul is always decked in the virtues worthy of the habit—of penance, humility, patience, obedience, and, above all, the holy fear and love of God. Love with all your heart this vile servitude and much-despised slavery to which you have willingly abandoned yourself at the feet of Jesus crucified, which are the poor to whom you are willingly the handmaid for the rest of your life. Often recall your first fervor, and when you feel yourself relenting or growing cold communicate, with the permission of the saintly Superioress, to rewarm and reanimate in your heart the first fervor and the fire you displayed when you left us, your father and me; for that is the secret of secrets in the ways of God. Know, my child, that the cross of our adorable Saviour, with whom you wish to be crucified, was ornamented with three principal stones—contempt, labor, and sorrow. These are the three principal stones of perfection, which I beg you, for the love of God and His Holy Mother, to desire and seek after as the greatest joy and glory to which you can arrive. Ah, how happy am I to have borne in my bosom a daughter whom I shall see glorious in heaven for having, in imitation of her Master Jesus, loved to be despised and contemned by all creatures, and to have borne the most painful labors and piercing sorrows of mind and heart!" (Arch. of the Mission.)

now is to admire in the labor of all the Divine hand, which developed the growing work and placed it on a continually strengthening foundation.

The year 1642—the period in which the company first made holy vows—was also marked by the adoption of divers measures destined to render discipline more exact and the organization more complete. The most important of these was the nomination of a director. M. Portail, of whom we have already spoken, was associated in all the works of St. Vincent from the commencement of his apostleship. His first disciple, then his first companion, he had now become his right arm, his other self, and the general assembly of the Priests of the Mission, held in October, elected him first assistant and monitor. The choice of the Saint naturally fell on him. Long initiated in the designs of the founder, whom he often accompanied to the parlor conferences at St. Lazarus, no one was more suitable to unfold the ideas set forth in these verbal instructions, and to conserve their spirit in the outline of rules just confided to him.*

This was not the only help given to Mlle. Le Gras, for soon after she received from St. Vincent's hand her first assistant. This was a Parisian, Julienne Loret, twenty-three years old, originally belonging to St. Jacques-du-Haut-Pas, who, as her companions said, "in a small body possessed a large soul."† Her

* Letter of M. Portail to Mlle. Le Gras, March 18, 1646, and of Mlle. Le Gras to M. Portail, May 11, 1646.

† Conference upon the virtues Sr. Julienne Loret, 1699.

mind was calm and judicious, her character firm, "she spoke little and very justly," and without any noise adhered to her decision. As skilful to write out a Conference as to compose a remedy or dress a wound, delicate of conscience and energetic in action, cutting to the quick when necessary, she managed her time so well that she thought with simplicity there were no accounts to be rendered one day on that score, and she would be satisfied to remain on earth could she there be occupied every instant with God, faithful to her favorite device—Love or death. To this first officer St. Vincent joined a treasurer and dispenser. Thus a council became constituted, whom he charged to learn how to treat an affair, to propose, to discuss, examining the pros and cons, so as to arrive at certain sure conclusions.*

This more complete organization seemed to call for some material improvement that Mlle. Le Gras very much desired. Unfortunately the house was small, and to enlarge it funds were wanting. They had to be satisfied with making a parlor of one room, without the addition of a grating, however, lest in process of time they might be tempted to turn the company into religious,† which, said the founder,

* Unpublished Conference, June 28, 1646.

† Religious, viz., into a religious Order. We have said elsewhere that all the Orders of women were cloistered at that time. Shut in behind a grating, the Sisters of Charity would have destroyed their work. For this reason St. Vincent said to them, "If any one ask, Are you religious? answer, No. Not that you do not esteem them,

would only be "the work of bad minds," and quite contrary to what God requires. But when they thought of a special place for the newly arrived, a kind of novitiate, they had to abandon the idea. It was decided at least that they should assemble at an appointed hour and receive information and instruction from Sr. Julienne, whose renown for wisdom had spread abroad so that persons from outside came to consult her. "They were," said Mlle. Le Gras, "young plants whom the Lord had placed in His garden; it was necessary to water and cultivate them with care."

Nothing had been formally regulated with regard to their costume. The first Daughters of Charity, originally from the environs of Paris, had preserved the clothing then in usage with the common people;* viz., a dress ordinarily of a gray color, leaving the sleeves of the chemise to be seen closed at the wrist, and a little head-band of white linen, which hid the hair. The young girls of the province, who were asked no other dowry than the price of their first habit, were obliged to adopt this costume for the sake of uniformity.† Some of them,

but to be 'religious' you must be enclosed, and then you could not serve the poor." (Instructions to the Sisters going to Nantes.)

* In the approbation given by the Cardinal Legate, June 8, 1668, it is said: "The Sisters, called of 'Charity,' having resolved by Divine inspiration to live together in community, without, however, quitting the secular habit. . . ."

† They had also to be furnished with a sum equivalent to their fare to Paris, in case they did not persevere and had to return to their homes.

who complained of not having the face sufficiently covered from the cold and heat, petitioned to add a little black veil, but the petition was rejected. The only addition permitted (and only to those residing in the country) was a head-dress of white linen, called *cornette*,* over the head-band. This was worn at that time by the peasantry in the Isle of France.†

With the exception of this indulgence, there was nothing to distinguish the Sisters of the province from those of the mother-house, whose usages, customs, and diet had in a measure the force of law. Thus, little by little, the work took a definite form, and "Providence blessed it with a commencement of order and foundation,"‡ while at the same time He multiplied exteriorly the most evident signs of His Divine protection. This double manifestation was not unnoticed by the founders, in whose letters and conversations we are permitted to admire, with them, the Divine goodness watching over the Daughters even in the accomplishment of their humblest duties. At one time a young Sister washing linen in the river near the Hôtel-Dieu falls into the rushing water, but is taken out unhurt. Another time a Sister was in a house when it fell and buried forty persons beneath

* Letter of Mlle. Le Gras to M. Portail, Aug. 13, 1646.

† Notes and manuscripts of the Congregation in Spain (Arch. of the Mission). Such is the origin of the *cornette*, which was definitely determined to be worn by the whole community, in 1685.

‡ Unpublished Conference, June 28, 1646.

the ruins.* The Sister, however, remained unhurt, standing quietly on the only step of the staircase that was not crushed. The people in the street reached up a pole on which she hung her soup-pot, and then, trusting herself to Providence, she jumped into the cloaks that were held out for her. She trembled a little, but continued on her way to the sick. "Ah! my daughters," said St. Vincent when relating this fact to her companions, "what reasons have you not to trust in God! We read in history of a man being killed in the open field by the weight of a tortoise which an eagle dropped on his head, and to-day we see a Daughter of Charity emerge without a scratch from the ruins of a house overturned to the very foundation. Is not this a sensible proof by which God lets us know that they are dear to Him as the apple of His eye? O my daughters, rest assured that, provided you preserve this confidence in your hearts, God will preserve *you* wherever you may be."

Another day Mlle. Le Gras escaped from death in so striking a manner that she has left the record of it to the community. It was the eve of Pentecost in the year 1644. She was preparing for the next day by finishing a retreat, when she heard something crack in the floor. She was not disposed to pay any attention to it, but, yielding to the wish of an old Sister, she arose to leave the apartment, and had gone as far as the door when the beams broke and the floor

* During a visit she was making to a sick person in the Faubourg Saint-Germain.

gave way entirely.* When St. Vincent heard what had happened, he set no bounds to his thanksgiving to God; but he wrote a note† immediately to his spiritual daughter, recalling the walls of Jericho and the answer of our Lord concerning the man born blind, telling her to be very careful not to consider as a chastisement an accident in which the Divine mercy shone with so much lustre. This advice was very opportune, for Mlle. Le Gras and her Daughters were very much frightened at the danger she had been in. We read her gratitude to-day in the little notes she took in which she sums up the mysterious lessons taught her by this event. "It seems to me," she writes, "that I ought to endeavor to remember it all my life, and to thank God for my interior sentiments at that time." That *crash* brought to her mind the great interior crushing which she experienced when, twenty years before, "God granted her light and understanding, day by day, on the subject of her three great uncertainties and anxieties which overwhelmed her," and she concludes that the whole company should have a great devotion for the Feast of Pentecost, on which God gave to Moses the law of fear, to the Church the law of grace, to her heart the law of love, and to the whole congregation so

* The Ladies of Charity from the Hôtel-Dieu had been assembled for this day with Mlle. Le Gras, and St. Vincent would have been with them in the same hall had not affairs of importance called him elsewhere.

† Letter 403.

signal a mark of assistance." She then expresses a desire that every year her Daughters would spend in retreat the time between Ascension and Pentecost, waiting, in union with the Blessed Virgin and the Apostles, the coming of the Holy Spirit. "This voice of God," as she designates the grace bestowed upon her, teaches her above all that total dependence on Divine Providence is one of the dispositions in which she should maintain the company. Following up an idea that we can only understand imperfectly, "God," she says, "has a purpose that we know not, and He requires, to accomplish that purpose, certain efforts from one and the other. I hope His goodness will make known something for the solid establishment of this little family to our honored Father, in whom I seem to see the interior operations of grace, and also in the souls of some of our Sisters." Then her thoughts collect themselves on this wish, which we find entire: "I would wish with my whole heart to give and acquire much glory for God, that we may correspond with His design in permitting what has happened."

Glory given to God, the solid establishment of the company, and the union of the whole family, is the most ardent desire of the foundress; it is also the grand and beautiful panorama which successive events will unfold to our view.

CHAPTER XI.

1646—1648.

St. Vincent and Mlle. Le Gras solicit an Approbation for the Company
—The Sisters are asked for in Brittany—The Approbation granted,
but the Articles astray—Divisions and Difficulties at Nantes—
Changes at the Foundling House—Celebrated Peroration of St.
Vincent de Paul.



WHILE the little company was growing under the eye of God, the founder and his faithful co-operator decided to ask from ecclesiastical authority an official recognition of its existence and the erection of it into a confraternity. Ever united in action, one doing nothing without the other, they shared this work also. St. Vincent took on himself to draft the request which Mlle. Le Gras was to present to the prelate who then governed the Church in Paris.* Some days after the Saint wrote to Louise : “ Here is the memorial ; it contains three points : first, the ways of Providence in instituting the Daughters ; second, their mode of life to the present time ; third, the rules of their association. I have given the first two, that Mgr. and his colleagues may be informed of everything by their perusal, and I suppress a number of things I might add about

* Gobillon, p. 161. This prelate was Mgr. J. Francis de Gondy.

you. Let us leave to our Lord to tell that to every one and hide ourselves."

The document has been preserved to us. We might call it a chapter of the foundation related by the founder; thus we cannot do better than quote a part of it and abridge the rest. The Saint commences by recalling the origin of the numerous charities established in the diocese, then the necessity of assisting the ladies by some girls of good will. "These girls," he said, "have been fitted for this work by a virtuous widow, Mlle. Le Gras, who kept them in her house, and during the thirteen or fourteen years since the work commenced God has so blessed it that in every parish there are three or four girls assisting the sick or instructing poor children. They live at the expense of the confraternity of the parish; but so frugally that one hundred livres and sometimes twenty-five crowns suffices for food and clothing the whole year. Three are employed by the Ladies of Charity at the Hôtel-Dieu, ten or twelve at the Hospital of the Foundlings, two or three assist the galley-slaves, without counting those who are filling similar offices in Angers, Richelieu, Saint-Germain-en-Laye, St. Denis, and other places of the country. As they are constantly asked for, Mlle. Le Gras is keeping others in her house, ordinarily about thirty, who while receiving instruction from her on their life and calling, are employed, some to instruct the little girls of the parish who come to the school, others to attend the sick or in the different duties of the house.

They maintain themselves by their labor, the alms of charitable persons, and an annual revenue of two thousand livres allowed them by the king and queen and also by the Duchess of Aiguillon." St. Vincent here dilates on the good results which follow spiritually from the corporal assistance given to the sick and dying—"a most certain mark of vocation," he took care to subjoin, and at the same time said nothing of what did not come under the consent and permission of the prelate. "But since works which regard the service of God generally finish with those who commence them unless there is some spiritual bond between the persons employed in them," he asks the archbishop of Paris "to approve the rule by which they have lived to the present and propose to live for the future, and to constitute them into a Company under the name of Daughters and Widows, Servants of the Poor, of Charity." He added to his request an abridged copy of the rule itself.

Several months passed without an answer from Mgr. de Gondy. This circumstance gives us a correspondence between Mlle. Le Gras and M. Portail, then on a tour through the provinces of the west. Profiting of his journey, this Director of the Daughters of Charity was seeing about placing them in the Hôtel-Dieu at Mans. This seemed an easy matter, thanks to the good reputation of the missionaries and the watchful care of the administrators. The hospital was attended by nurses; but it was hoped that they could be gained to

the practice of the rule* by the good example of the Sisters chosen to be the foundation stones. These sisters, "with affection for doing good" delighted St. Vincent, especially the one who, with "heart all charity," was Sister-Servant Jeanne Lepeintre.

Vain hopes! A month was scarcely over when the most absurd stories were circulated in the town. It was said that when postulants entered the community they were sent to the new colony founded in Canada, where the Duchess of Aiguillon was bestowing her fortune, and it was whispered about that they would be married to the Canadian savages for the purpose of propagating Catholicity. But there arose what was worse than these foolish reports; viz., disagreements among the authorities who ruled the house. From all these facts, the details of which are wanting, it was decided that the Sisters should be recalled. They left Mans, therefore, with the serenity and meekness which they had maintained through all their difficulties. "The money and time were well spent,"† said M. Portail, "if they did no other good in that place than to preach by their modesty and instruct by their unalterable calmness in such tempests." The gates of Mans were closed against them, as the Gospel‡ relates those of Samaria were against our Lord. But

* Rule drawn up for the Sisters going to Mans. (Arch. of the Mission).

† To Mlle. Le Gras, June 4, 1664.

‡ Letter 9-52-55.

those of a large neighboring city were open to receive them. The managers, or, as they were called, the "Fathers of the Poor," in the hospital of St. René, Nantes, having heard of the Sisters at Angers, wrote to St. Vincent, begging for six of his Daughters, on the same conditions. The Saint granted them with joy; and Mlle. Le Gras, whom he always advised to "imitate Solomon by putting fine stones in the foundation," took particular care in her selection of these. She proposed their names for his approval in the council.

The choice of Sister-Servant took place some time after, in the midst of the assembly, and was the occasion of a scene which we shall relate in all its simplicity. The council had assembled, and Elizabeth Martin, without knowing what was going on, was sent for by St. Vincent. He told her to be seated, and then asked her why she had entered the company. "Sir," she said, "it was to do the will of God." "And do you wish to do it still?" he asked; and turning quite pleasantly to M. Almeras,* whom he had brought with him, he said, "Well, God be praised, my daughter; He now gives you a fine chance!" He then told her that they were going to open a new mission in one of the largest cities of the kingdom, and that Providence had chosen her for Sister-Servant. "What shall we give Sister Elizabeth for her journey?" he asked, while she remained

* This was his future successor—the child baptized at the church of Saint-Gervais the day of the marriage of Mlle. Le Gras.

mute with astonishment; "each one must give her something. Let us see. What virtue can we give her?" The first interrogated, wished for her companion the love of God; another, wished her love for the poor; Mlle. Le Gras, the cordial support of her Sisters; and M. Almeras, invited to make his present also, wished her "gay patience." "See what riches, my daughter, of which I wish you the plenitude," said St. Vincent; "but what I wish for you especially is to do the will of God, which consists not only in doing what our superiors prescribe, though this is a sure way to arrive at it, but still more in corresponding with all the interior inspirations that God will send us."

The rebuff at Mans, and the thought that her Daughters might not find even at Nantes the support of the missionaries, induced Mlle. Le Gras to conduct this new colony herself into Brittany. She knew in advance that this determination would cause much sorrowful surprise to those who remained in Paris; therefore she wished before leaving to give them written instructions, in which we read the acceptance of the Divine Will. "I recall to you," she says in this note, "the compact we made together never to gainsay the guidance of Divine Providence, and to abandon ourselves to it entirely. Let us take this journey, you and I, as putting into practice this promise so often renewed." *

* Note entitled: "Advice before a journey."

Then entering into the minutiae of particular duties, she advised Jeanne Lepeintre, the Sister named to hold her place as Sister-Servant, to give exact account to the other two officers every fortnight; to decide on no important matter without the advice of M. Vincent or M. Lambert,* who had been appointed Superior in the absence of M. Portail. Each Sister in the house received a charge, and with it advice how to accomplish it. Some were named to visit the Sisters in the parishes every eight or ten days. This they were to do "in view of God and holy obedience, and to bring to this duty of affection and cordiality the great meekness of the Son of God." On the eve of her departure she went to receive the blessing of St. Vincent, and as she expressed in her humility a fear of committing many faults, he invited her to write an account of herself on the way. Happy thought! for to her journal thus kept we owe the details of the longest journey of this saintly foundress. Her journal is preserved intact.

The little company numbered nine persons when Louise and her companions mounted the Orleans coach, July 26, 1646: the six Sisters destined for Nantes; Sister Turgis, who was going with them part of her way to Richelieu; and another who accompanied Mlle. Le Gras to return with her to Paris.

* **M. Lambert-aux-Couteaux**, born in 1606, in the diocese of Amiens, was the eleventh to enter into the institute, 1629. He established the Daughters of Charity at Richelieu and in Poland, and died 1683.

"We were quite gay," the latter writes, "and by the grace of God we had enough to talk about." She relates that as they approached a town or village, the travellers were sure to salute the good angels of the place and beg them to redouble their care over the souls confided to them. When they passed before a church they adored the Blessed Sacrament and invoked the patrons of the sanctuary. Arriving at the resting-place, one of them went in search of their modest repast, which they wished to have by themselves and not at the common table. The others meantime found the church, then went to salute their "dear masters" the poor, either at the hospital or in houses where there were sick, and distributed pictures, beads, and Catechisms to the children.

Thus they made the journey, doing good. They passed through Orleans, where they left the coach and took the boat. Through Tours, Saumur, Le Pont-de-Cé, "where they were happy enough to be chased from the inn for wishing to abstain from meat on Friday," and through Angers, where they stopped some days to the great joy of the Sisters in the hospital. At length, after a voyage which the low tide of the Loire made longer and more fatiguing than usual, they landed in the Breton city, on Thursday, August 8.

Mlle. Le Gras wished their arrival to be private; but they had been anxiously expected, and the crowds, already more than once disappointed, were now so dense and closely packed along the landing that it was with difficulty the Sisters could make

their way to the nearest church as was their custom. Great and small rejoiced at their coming. The administrators gave them full power in the hospital; the ladies of the city came to bid them welcome;* and several convents of religious expressed a desire to see them, as also their habit. The crowd of visitors did not diminish during the following days. They admired the good order and cleanliness (something new) of the wards. The meals of the poor and sick, served by Daughters of Charity, was such an interesting sight that the number who came to witness it made the duty still more difficult for the Sisters.

This unusual success surprised Mlle. Le Gras and filled her with gratitude. "I know not what will happen in that establishment where I have not yet seen the thorns," she wrote to St. Vincent,† "but so much praise from every one is incredible. May God grant me love strong enough to see in this the care of Divine Providence over us! Oh, how I should sing loud His praise! But I must stop short and content myself with supplicating the heavenly choirs to render fitting glory to God; and you, our honored Father, to whom God makes known His guidance over us, to supply for our defects."

* "I believe there was not a single lady of rank who did not come to see them; even ladies came on purpose from the country. It is owing to your charity that we receive such honor here. Do not deceive them about me; they mistake me for a great lady. Oh, how I shall burn one day, and what confusion shall be mine!" (Letter of Mlle. Le Gras to St. Vincent, Aug. 21, 1646.)

† Aug. 11, 1646.

Almost three weeks passed and the act of establishment was not yet signed. This time seemed all the longer for Louise by the serious illness of her son in Paris. The morning of the day she received this news she was incited by some secret presentiment* to make a complete abandonment of this child of many tears into the hands of Him who wishes to be called "Our Father." Her confidence was not deceived, and the young Michel, boarding with the physician and visited by St. Vincent, was out of danger before she was able to leave Nantes. The first part of the journey was by water, but "the wind and waves were contrary," writes Mlle. Le Gras in her recital, "which gave us two or three good frights;" hence, notwithstanding the displeasure and the expense, the rest of the route was accomplished by land.

Great was the joy of her Daughters in Paris to find themselves once more under her direction; and the most sanguine expectations of all seemed realized when it was known that the Archbishop had at length acceded to the request of St. Vincent, and that his coadjutor, Cardinal de Retz, had approved the existence and rules of the Daughters of Charity,† and that the king for his part had consented to grant them letters patent. A singular circumstance happened, and one disastrous in appearance, but Providence made known the design of it later on.

* Letter of Mlle. Le Gras to St. Vincent, Aug. 21, 1646.

† Oct. 20, 1646.

The Procurator-General* had given the items of St. Vincent's petition to his secretary to have them registered in the Parliament. The secretary put them astray, and died soon after. Every search was made for the missing papers, but in vain; and St. Vincent was informed that he must write his petition and commence proceedings all over again.

We may believe that this unforeseen accident was a great disappointment to Louise; for her advanced age and that of the Saint made them both desire to have their work established on a definite base as soon as possible. Nevertheless she testified no regret; she even rejoiced interiorly at the trial; and this is easily explained from the fact that St. Vincent, in the copy of rules submitted to Mgr. de Gondy had given the direction of the confraternity into the hands of the Archbishop of Paris. So scrupulously respectful was he of the rights of the episcopate that he was willing to be blotted out himself, and all belonging to him, rather than encroach in the slightest particular. An ecclesiastic chosen by the prelate, he said, would be designated Superior, and they would obey him in all that appertained to their conduct. The project had been adopted without modification, and the founder himself was charged with the government of the company which owed its existence to him. It might be asked what would happen if, after his death, a strange ruler

* M. de Meliand.

succeeding him, the bond uniting the double family should be severed. Such, indeed, was the thought which weighed on the soul of Mlle. Le Gras. She foresaw the changes in the rule and spirit of the company that a different government would be likely to effect; thus, when she heard of the papers being astray, she did not hesitate to implore St. Vincent to correct this point of the first compiling. "In the name of God," she writes, "permit nothing to transpire that in the least point would withdraw the company from the direction which God has given it; for you may be quite sure this will happen when you are no more: the sick poor will not be attended to, and thus the will of God will be no longer amongst us."*

This conviction strengthened every day; experience lent it vigor, and she gave it expression with an exactness, perspicuity, and sometimes with a tone of authority quite unusual to her. But if the loss of the letters of approbation obliged St. Vincent to new formalities, it was not the less true that the company was morally recognized and had its place in the sunshine of the Church. Mlle. Le Gras believed herself authorized to claim favors from Rome. M. Portail† was about to be sent by Vincent to the

* Letter without date—probably 1646.

† M. Portail was sent to Rome in April, 1647, to visit the missions established there some years previous by the bounty of the Duchess of Aiguillon. He there fell sick, and, according to the expression of Mlle. Le Gras, "on leaving the Eternal City he mistook Paradise

Eternal City, where Louise had often wished to go herself, but her age and continually increasing infirmities made her now abandon that hope, and she profited of this occasion to have M. Portail solicit for herself and for all the Daughters of Charity a plenary indulgence at the hour of death.*

In spite of the absence of the ambassador through whom these sorts of requests were transmitted, the attempt was crowned with success, and M. Portail hastened to inform Mlle. Le Gras.† He wrote, "Although his Holiness does not generally grant this indulgence to so many persons at a time, yet

for Paris." We have several letters exchanged between them at this time. In one of these, dated from the Abbey of Saint-Sauveur, fifteen miles from "this desert, where the air is more temperate and more healthy," M. Portail recommends himself humbly to the prayers of the community, for, he said, "having lived in holy Rome does not make every one a saint."

* Letter of Mlle. Le Gras to M. Portail, June 21, 1647.

† December 1, 1647. Some years later, towards 1652, Mlle. Le Gras begged the Apostolic Benediction through M. Berthe, Priest of the Mission, as is proved by the following written by her :

"Louise de Marillac, twenty-seven years a widow, Servant of Jesus Christ and of His members the poor, in will if not in effect; deeply attached by obedience to the Holy Father; a Roman Catholic, and on account of a long-cherished desire to receive at least once during life the Apostolic Benediction, she begs most humbly M. Berthe, Priest of the Mission, to present her in spirit at the feet of the present Holy Father, true vicegerent of Jesus Christ, by the zeal his Holiness displays for the faith of the Church. She begs this to obtain grace from God to do His will in all things for the rest of her days. In return for this charity she will consider herself obliged to pray to God for his Holiness."

the consideration of your employment in regard to the sick poor induced him to depart from his usual custom. All your Sisters living at present will share in this favor." He then takes occasion to explain the word *mulier*, which in the Court at Rome means woman or girl; he also tells her that, as an acknowledgment of the part they take in the "charity," the missionaries who reside in Rome will celebrate, each one, a mass on the tomb of St. Peter and make the tour of the seven Basilican churches for the intention of the Ladies of Charity, especially for those among them who so often sent by letters and messages to beg that favor.

The assistance of prayer was indeed more necessary now than ever to Mlle. Le Gras; for a time of labor and suffering had succeeded the period of silence and recollection mentioned in the preceding chapter. Physical sufferings, divisions in part of her flock, difficulties in her works, besides fears arising from public troubles—everything seemed to come at once. Her health had been so good on her return from Nantes that she was able to write back, "I am so well that I have a great mind to do nothing else than run over the country, provided there was any good to be done." * Now, however, she had fallen again into her "infirmities and laziness," as she called her sickness. "I have been a long time sick and even in danger, as they say," we read in a letter of Jan. 1, 1647; and a

* To Sr. Jeanne Lepeintre, Nantes, 1646.

little later, "I had not recovered from my sickness of the winter when I had another and more dangerous attack." A violent headache was the result of a three weeks' journey to the country; and soon after, grief at the loss of one of her Daughters brought on a fever. St. Vincent wrote: "To see her one would suppose that she had just arisen from the grave, so weak and pale she appears. She has no life but what she receives from grace, being naturally dead for the last ten years. But her soul rules all in her, and if obedience had not stopped her you would see her still busy visiting her Daughters and laboring with them everywhere."

In her family at this very time was a little group needing her presence most especially. If she could rely on the "wise government" of Julienne Loret and let her rule the community in the Faubourg Saint Denis, at Nantes the tares seemed to be stifling the good grain.* Discord was reigning among the Sisters; each one had her party either inside or outside the house, and the ordinary authorities seemed powerless to restore order. Unable to go herself, Mlle. Le Gras sent in her place Sister Jeanne Lepeintre, whom she thought "very much attached to the will of God, and much enlightened with regard to her duties," and whose influence, "mild and judicious," would suffice to bring back every one to the right path. At the same time, Mlle. Le Gras sent to her

* Letter of Mlle. Le Gras to the Sisters at Nantes, March 8, 1647.

Daughters a long letter from St. Vincent "which she could not read without emotion," she writes, "so afflicted was she at the thought of so many faults committed;" and to give efficacy to her advice she humbles herself. "Do not think I say this to frighten you, or that I am addressing you alone. I say it to myself, and to all who, like me, have made a bad use of our vocation. Oh, how often have I committed the faults I suspect in you! What cause of fear have I not that my bad example has left fatal impressions on your minds! Ask pardon of God for me, and do better than you have ever seen me do."*

The arrival of M. Lambert, the advice he gave, along with the removal of some of the Sisters, seemed to re-establish peace among the Sisters of Charity; but the end of the trouble was not yet. The wind of tribulation began to blow from without, and difficulties multiplied. On one side, the managers of the hospital required duties contrary to their agreement; on the other hand, the bishops, misunderstanding the spirit of the work, wished to give them the character of a religious Order; while the municipality accused the Sisters of appropriating the property of the poor and ruining the hospital.† Thus the foundation at Nantes, which was at first the most promising, now seemed on the point of ruin.

* "Avis laissés à nos très-chères Sœurs de la Charité, Servantes des pauvres de l'hôpital de Nantes, par Lambert, Prêtre de la Mission, l'année, 1648." (Arch. of the Mission.)

† Letter of St. Vincent to Mlle. Le Gras, Nantes, April 28, 1649.

Although not ignorant of the designs of Providence in permitting trials at the beginning of nearly every religious undertaking, yet the Mother shared the sorrow of her Daughters. "How it pains me to know that you suffer!" she wrote; "but what do I say? I ought rather to envy you, since it is for God." She recommended to them especially to suffer in silence, and, "without wishing to conquer, to accept calumny as did their Divine Master, who lived and died in peace in the midst of His calumniators; to practise their rules exactly; if not, they would only be like a broken chain." *

"Be strong, Daughters," she said to them on another occasion; "are you not Daughters of Charity? But Charity loves and suffers all things."† To Jeanne Lepeintre: "The world is babbling against you; it is only the Evil Spirit playing his game; he will gain nothing provided that you gather yourselves beneath the cross like chickens beneath the hen when frightened by the hawk." As there was serious question of their departure from Nantes, she writes again: "They wish to send you off, but nothing can happen except for your good. . . . Going out, you will only have to shake the dust from your feet, and one day we shall bless God for this persecution."‡

* To Sr. Jeanne Lepeintre at Nantes, July 20, 1647.

† Letter, not dated, the only one, we believe, bearing the signature: "Louise de Marillac, Daughter of Charity, most unworthy Servant of the Poor."

‡ To Sr. Jeanne Lepeintre, June 15, 1649.

The future reserved for the poor Sisters an unexpected joy in a visit from St. Vincent, who was obliged to travel into Brittany the following year.* The mischief continued still a long time, and Sister Jeanne, sent for a few months to Nantes, was obliged to remain six years.† Mlle. Le Gras had the pleasure of seeing an end to the trouble before she died. "It is not," she said, as if to excuse herself, "that I under-rate the designs of God mingled in thorns and roses; but after having suffered so much, I love to see you enjoy that peace and meekness which always are found in the service of the poor when performed without regard to other affairs, and I hope that peace will add to your cordiality."‡

The critical situation of the Sisters at Nantes was not the only thorn which pierced her heart at this time. Another establishment, older and not less dear, seemed equally in danger. We mean the Foundling Asylum, the history of which we shall re-trace a few steps.

We have already stated that for a long time their revenue was only equivalent to fourteen hundred francs. St. Vincent obtained from the king four thousand French livres annually—three thousand for the support of the children, and one thousand for the Sisters—to be raised on the Estate of Gonnesse.

* In April, 1649.

† We have forty letters from Mlle. Le Gras to Jeanne Lepeintre at this time.

‡ To Sr. Jeanne Lepeintre at Nantes, July 26, 1651.

Afterwards, from the Queen Regent, Anne of Austria, he obtained another eight thousand livres on the five farms.* All these subsidies were not sufficient, however, to cover expenses, which in 1644 had exceeded 40,000 livres; and the building occupied by the children having become too small, the Ladies of Charity were petitioning the queen for the Château de Bicêtre,† where, towards the month of July, 1647,‡ they installed their young protégés.

From the first, Mlle. Le Gras was not pleased with this arrangement. She feared the expense necessary to support a building one half of which would not be occupied in ten years; the distance from Paris; the coming and going of the Sisters, which would inevitably occasion distraction and fatigue; finally, the difficulty of transporting the children on account of bad roads and the nature of the ground.§ The facts, which justified her forethought, singularly confirmed her repugnance. "It was not without reason," we read in one of her letters, "that I feared the abode at Bicêtre."|| And

* Letters patent of 1642, 1643. (Arch. Nat. 6160.)

† The Château de Bicêtre, built under Charles V. by Jean, Duke of Berry, had been restored under the preceding reign to serve as a hospital for invalid soldiers.

‡ From this place we have many letters of Mlle. Le Gras to St. Vincent, dated 1647. Abelly seems to mistake when he says it was after the assembly of "Charity," 1648, that the ladies obtained the Château de Bicêtre.

§ Letter to St. Vincent, Aug. 19.

|| Ibid. July 1647.

she relates the embarrassment of the Daughters of Charity when the ladies required them to occupy small unhealthy rooms and allowed them no chaplain. "They wanted our Sisters to go to Mass at Gentilly; meantime what would the children do, and who would see to the work? I fear much that we must quit the service of the little ones." This was not all: "This magnificent place was supposed to belong to the Foundlings;" and the great rank of the ladies who governed it* gave reason to consider it richly endowed; and as it is quite pleasant to repose on the charity of others, alms became more and more rare until they finally ceased altogether.

This situation of affairs weighed heavily on Louise for some time, but it could not be prolonged. St. Vincent, therefore, decided to call a general assembly† of the Ladies of Charity. In this assembly, and in presence of Mlle. Le Gras, he proposed this solemn question: "Must this work be continued or should it be abandoned?" Faithful to his rule of examining the pros and cons of every question, he represented to them on one side that, having contracted no engagement, they were free to leave off; but, on the other hand, it was well to consider the good already accomplished and that which could still be effected. At this point of the discourse, St. Vincent, no longer able to control the emotion pent up in his heart, burst forth into this celebrated peror-

* Letter to St. Vincent, Jan. 23, 1648.

† In 1648.

ration: "Come now, ladies, compassion and charity made you adopt these little creatures for your children. You have been their mothers according to grace since they were forsaken by their mothers according to nature. See now if you also can forsake them. Cease to be their mothers and become their judges: their life or death is in your hands. I shall take your votes of suffrage: it is time to pronounce the decree, and find out if you will no longer have mercy on them. They will live if you continue your charitable care of them; they must die and inevitably perish if you abandon them."

The assembly answered by their tears. When the emotion had subsided, the work was declared necessary and to be continued at any price. But as circumstances occurred we must relate them, and we have to acknowledge that the zeal of the ladies again grew cold, and the entire labor of the work fell once more on Mlle. Le Gras and her Daughters. In several of her letters she remarks with sorrow and almost fright: "It is pitiable that these ladies trouble themselves so little. Do they think we have enough to support the work, or do they wish us to abandon it?" *And elsewhere: "These good ladies have not done what they could. None of them has sent any money,† therefore there is no corn and we must borrow; there is no linen; twelve or fifteen children are without clothing; sev-

* Letter to St. Vincent, Nov. 1649.

† The same.

eral others refuse the bottle, but there is not a cent to put them out to nurse, and the poor people of the neighborhood bring back the older children before they are weaned: they were entrusted to them and paid for in advance, but the people tire of them. Debts, in fine, are increasing to such extent that there is no hope of ever paying them." *

The charity of Louise multiplied itself, and she exercised no little ingenuity by reason of these difficulties. She had poor-boxes placed in the parishes, and had the priests and preachers recommend the work; she suggested to the ladies to beg at the court,† and also each one in her own neighborhood.‡ She herself begged from generous ladies and powerful ministers, visited the Princess of Condé, and invoked the pity of Chancellor Seguier. "One hundred poor little creatures," she wrote, "are threatened with not having bread during these feast-days. Their necessities weigh heavy on my heart."§ The Sisters spun, made bread and cooked food, which, on account of the scarcity of provisions, sold at a high price. They even took from their own subsistence; for in the time of greatest distress Mlle. Le Gras gave out the little she had on reserve; and as they were not to have money for some time, the whole community was limited to one meal per day.

* To St. Vincent, Dec. 1649.

† Same date.

‡ To Mme. de Lamoignon, Nov. 15.

§ Nat. Lib. MS., f. 17391, p. 212 (Corresp. Seguier).

This neglect of the ladies in the Hôtel-Dieu, whom we have known to be at one time so generous, would be inexplicable were we left in ignorance of circumstances taking place at the time of which we treat, and which we shall strive to set forth in the following chapter.

CHAPTER XII.

1649—1652.

Mlle. Le Gras and her Daughters during the Fronde—Civil War and Charity—The Sisters in Picardy ; in Champagne ; in the Beauce at Paris—Death of Mgr. Camus and of the Widow of President Lamoignon—Marriage of Michel Le Gras—Birth of a Little Daughter.

THE PEACEFUL events we have recorded most bring us to the threshold of one of the stormy periods in our history. Interior quarrels were added to exterior strife, discord, devastation. No evil seemed wanting at the first Fronde, followed, alas ! by so many others, more terrible, reaching to our own time. The nature of our story does not permit us to dwell long on the dismemberment of royalty ; but we cannot pass it over in absolute silence.

Retired from public affairs as was the life of Mlle. Le Gras ; stranger as she was to passing events ; knowing of peace and war, as she said herself, "only what every one knew," yet it was impossible for her not to be deeply moved by the effects of these public agitations. The dramatic yet sorrowful spectacle of a great city a prey to civil war, whole provinces desolated by a foreign enemy, the poor made victims

of both, is what the Daughters of Charity were destined too often to confront. Hence we may see how God permitted their foundress to serve even in this instance as a model for those who were to come after her.

“Mazarin, equal to Richelieu in diplomacy, was not his equal in the masterly genius necessary for the interior administration of State affairs.” Occupied incessantly in the care of himself, of aggrandizing the estates and establishing the authority of the kingdom, he paid less attention to the proper guidance of the realm, and allowed abuses and disorders to be everywhere introduced. France was exhausted; taxation necessarily increased; even public offices were sold to maintain four or five great armies and a considerable fleet, while no victory recorded could make the people forget the heavy load weighing upon them. Hence Talon, the Attorney-General, was truly the organ of public opinion when with severity he reminded the Queen that “the honor of battles gained, the glory of provinces conquered, could not support those who were in want of bread.” A riot which broke out in Paris during a *Te Deum* sung in honor of the victory of Lens * justified these words, while it served as the signal for trouble.

Anne of Austria, alarmed, and not without reason, to see twelve hundred barricades in the streets of

* Aug. 26, 1648.

the capital and quite near her royal palace, sanctioned all the political reforms proposed to her by the parliament. But soon after, hoping to conquer resistance by the army of Flanders, which the treaty of Westphalia empowered her to call to her aid, she fled to Saint-Germain with her son, and the blockade of Paris was begun. St. Vincent was frightened. Agonized at the prospect of the crimes resulting always from a war "*more than civil*," as Cardinal Bérulle calls it, he determined to take a step to which his membership of the Council of Conscience* especially entitled him. He followed at great risk to Saint-Germain, and sought to influence the Queen and the Cardinal; but he had the mortification to find his advice refused. Mlle. Le Gras was not aware of this attempt on the part of St. Vincent. Matthew Molé was the only person who was informed of it in advance; but his departure was soon noised abroad in Paris, and by one of those misconceptions so frequent in times of commotion his intention was completely misconstrued. The people rushed in tumult to the house of St. Lazarus, the keys of which a member of parliament had previously obtained under pretence of examining the corn. It was literally sacked. Everything in the granary was seized; the wood-shed was set on fire; six hundred men were for three days encamped in the

* This Council was established by the Queen in 1643, to treat of ecclesiastical affairs. It was composed of Cardinal Mazarin, the Chancellor, the Pénitencier of Paris, and St. Vincent de Paul.

buildings, where they racked and destroyed everything within their reach.

Louise, we know, lived opposite St. Lazare, whence she never thought of fleeing. "I think you very courageous to keep so well to your house," St. Vincent wrote on the first news of the pillage, and then retired to a little farm in the neighborhood of Étampes.* The state of affairs was truly critical. The Sisters of the villages near Paris took refuge in the mother-house; the foundlings had been transferred from Bicêtre with the nurses and the twelve Sisters who took care of them.† To find provisions for this unexpected host was no easy task, for everything edible was dear and scarce, so that even the rich had not enough for their need.‡ Mlle. Le Gras had the greatest difficulty in procuring grain in sufficient quantity; sometimes it was necessary to have an escort of soldiers to secure its safe arrival. This was not all: they were in constant danger of being attacked either by a

* Frénville, which had been given him by the wife of the President of Herse, and which depended on the parish of Puisseaux, where he had established the Daughters of Charity. The letter is dated Feb. 4, 1649.

† In April 1649 the Sisters returned to Bicêtre to occupy the place and cultivate the land, and in 1651 or 1652 the children were re-installed; but the air, too strong it seemed, did not agree with them, and they were permanently brought back to Paris and placed at the extremity of the Faubourg Saint-Lazarus. Little by little the ladies ceased to take interest in the work, and, left exclusively to Mlle. Le Gras, it soon began to prosper.

‡ Bread cost 24 sous the pound. (*Histoire de Mlle. de Lamoignon, par le P. d'Orléans.*)

mob, always on the point of collecting, or by wicked wretches too glad of the opportunity afforded by the excitement of the times. Caution was observed, therefore, in most minute details. The gates and doors had to be always kept locked, and, besides, a light was kept burning in the house, so as to be seen from the street;* in a word, they had to be constantly on the *qui vive*, and Louise recommended to Julienne Loret and Elizabeth Hellot, her assistants, to make sure there were enough persons in the house to defend it in case of attack, and to place the little they possessed (their little community) in the greatest possible safety.

The weight of affairs and responsibilities rested on her alone. M. Portail was at Marseilles, "detained there by Providence and obedience,"† and St. Vincent, after visiting the Missions in the West, encouraging on his way the Sisters of Nantes and Angers, who had given him, he said, "more consolation than anything in a long time,"‡ fell sick at Richelieu. "We are in great anxiety on account of M. Vincent," wrote Mlle. Gras the 6th of April, 1649, to the Abbé Vaux, "having received no news of him since the 14th of March, when he was in Mans. I know well that he has been in Angers also, but since not a word from any one, and the last we heard was not from him nor any person near him. Oblige me

* Letters of Mlle. Le Gras to Sisters Julienne Loret and Elizabeth Hellot.

* Letter of M. Portail to Mlle. Le Gras, Sept. 17, 1648.

† Letter to Mlle. Le Gras, April 15, 1649.

by letting us hear from you what you know about him." It was an additional trial for her to be deprived of his support in these afflictions; but prudence, by which the gift of God was manifest in her,* never left her, and thus her wise government was equal to all emergencies.

There was no good work interrupted. Barbara Angiboust put up the beds of the hospital which had been taken down for want of means to support them. The parish Sisters continued their visits. Those who were gardeners planted and sowed when the weather permitted. They planted "chicory in the roar of the cannonade, and beans as a souvenir of the war." Above all, they prayed: "they prayed for peace, for France, for the whole Church." One or two of the Sisters were always before the Blessed Sacrament, to help good souls in appeasing the wrath of God.†

The spirit of St. Vincent appeared to be ever present in the midst of his Daughters. The Ladies of Charity, incited by his lessons, did all they could to fight the misery invading the capital, and Mlle. Le Gras was anxious to do them justice. "You have no idea," ‡ she wrote, "of the amount of almsgiving in the city. . . . It seems as if the ladies took more pains in providing corn for the poor than for themselves." §

* Conference upon the virtues of Mlle. Le Gras.

† Letter to Sr. Hellot.

‡ To Sr. Jeanne Lepeintre, April 6, 1649.

§ To Sr. Anne Hardemont, at Montreuil, July 23, 1649.

To confirm this eulogy we need only refer to the fact that M. de Lamoignon having sent to Baille the grain intended for the support of his family, his wife and daughter gave it all to the poor in one day. St. Vincent said of him, "M. de Lamoignon runs so fast in the way of good works that no one can follow him." *

These workers of charity have been eclipsed in history by the brilliant Mme. de Longueville, Mme. de Bouillon, Mme. de Chevreuse, and Mme. de Montbazon; but more useful to the kingdom and far greater before the Lord, was a very young woman whom we have not been able to name before this, but whose image is too sympathetic to be passed over without a reverential salutation.

She was named Mme. de Beauharnais de Miramion, and was at sixteen years of age the widow of a counsellor in Parliament. One day, having heard of Louise through her friends Mmes. de Lamoignon and de Nesmond, she came to ask permission to make a retreat. "Mlle. Le Gras," says the Abbé de Choisy, "received her with open arms,"† and endeav-

* "*Histoire de Mlle. de Lamoignon.*"

† "*Vie de Mme. de Miramion, par l'Abbé de Choisy, 1707.*" M. Bonneau-Avenant, speaking of this retreat, said it was preached by St. Vincent. This is a mistake. St. Vincent, then absent from Paris, gave missions or sacerdotal retreats and directed particular ones, but he preached no retreats for ladies, this kind of preaching being unknown at that time. (For details, see the life, works, and parentage of Mme. de Miramion, the work of M. Bonneau-Avenant—Paris: Didier.)

ored earnestly to second the work of God in that soul. It seemed as if God had brought these two souls together to unite them once and forever in the love of the poor, and was only awaiting this moment to break the chains with which the world was striving to captivate one at least of these His servants.

The definite rupture with the world took place in the same house of the Sisters of Charity, as a result of a special grace she had received during her stay there, and which, by order of her confessor, Mme. de Miramion committed to writing. During the night of the 18th or 19th of January, 1649, it seemed to her that some one touched her on the shoulder and a Sister came to show her to the chapel. She opened her eyes, and a light brighter than that of the sun lit up her room, and she heard distinctly these words: "I am thy Lord and Master. . . . I wish for thee entirely, without reserve. . . . Thy heart is not too large for me. . . . I shall be thy spouse, and thou mine; engage thyself to be so." And it was gone, all but the grace. From that hour, the impression of which was never effaced, Mme. de Miramion became one of the most devoted, most deferential auxiliaries of Mlle. Le Gras. Docile to her counsels, she enrolled herself in the confraternity of St. Nicolas-des-Champs, her parish; soon after, she undertook to visit the sick at the Hôtel-Dieu; also to visit the prisoners and the bashful poor. She learned how to bleed, established schools in the villages, and founded

a house for young orphan girls, and participated largely in a work undertaken by St. Vincent and his Daughters in two of the desolated provinces.

For the space of ten years she endeavored strenuously to repair the disasters which the war was constantly renewing in Lorraine. One of the Mission Brothers,* her ordinary messenger, had not made fewer than fifty journeys there, loaded with alms from the Ladies of Charity in Paris. This time it was Champagne and Picardy, which the last campaign had reduced to such a state of misery that the reality, shown by recent publications,† surpasses by far the most extravagant dreams. From the month of May, 1635, these provinces had been covered by enemies and defenders equally pitiless, and were the theatre of success and reverse alike disastrous, being by their geographic position a convenient centre of assembly for the French troops, and the aim of incursion for the foreign army. For fifteen years the history of these regions might be summed up in villages burnt, cattle destroyed, harvests sacked, churches profaned, and cities transformed into deserts. The French seemed to equal in barbarity the Spaniards, and the pest followed in their flight the famished population, who, with their priest at their head, were wandering through the woods.

* Brother Matthew Renard, who ordinarily carried 20,000 or 30,000 livres, passed through the army and bands of robbers without ever losing a farthing. (Abelly, book i. p. 166.)

† "Journal d'un bourgeois de Marle," par M. Piette; "La Misère au temps de la Fronde," par M. Feillet.

No one in Paris thought of helping the distress that was scarcely known, when St. Vincent, learned from some travellers that a number of sick and wounded soldiers had been left by the French army near Guise, where the Spaniards had just raised the siege. His resolution was taken immediately, and, in concert with Mme. de Herse, he directed a convoy of provisions and money to be brought them by two of his missionaries. On their arrival in the country these priests rendered an account of affairs, stating that, to lend proper assistance, not only the soldiers, but the entire people, needed to share in the bounty. St. Vincent shuddered on reading the accounts sent him, and hastened to make a transcript of them, of which he had several thousand copies distributed, in order to arouse the charitable public.* Very soon alms flowed in abundantly to Mmes. de Lamoignon, de Herse, Nicolay, Traversay, Fouquet, Joly, Viole, and Miramion, who were appointed to receive them, while the Saint himself, giving the example of sacrifice, consecrated to this work, with the consent of the Ladies of Charity, the 80,000 livres they had given him some time previous for his house at St. Lazarus; and without delay sent sixteen of his priests and several Daughters of Charity—among whom was Barbara Angiboust, always on hand for difficult posts. These were to spread themselves in Vermandois, Soissons, the neigh-

* This publication was in print five years, from September 1650 to December 1655.

borhood of Rethel and Laon, and in the places most laid waste on the frontiers between Arras and Sedan. The missionaries traversed the country with provisions, clothing, bed-covers, grain for seed, and tools for those who were still able to work. The Daughters of Charity distributed meals to thousands, arranged the hospitals for the sick soldiers, and opened places of refuge for young girls. "There was no service, however painful or dangerous it might be, that was not generously rendered on this occasion,"* says Gobillon, "for saving bodily life, and thereby gaining the hearts of an infinite number of poor persons." The expense in 1651 amounted to more than fifteen thousand livres per month;† but the charity abated not, and the city whence came the impulse continued to show the greatest generosity. "All Paris," we read in a letter of St. Vincent to a missionary at a distance from France,‡ "contributes to this work." He left his most important duties to attend to it himself. The very day he wrote he had to attend a conference of his Daughters at the house of Mlle. Le Gras, to plan out, with the Duchess of Aiguillon and Mme. de Herse, some new methods of helping the poor country. The circumstances of the time rendered this enthusiasm of charity all the more admirable, we must remark, as the horrors occasioned in the city

* See his work already quoted, p. 166.

† Letter of St. Vincent to the municipal authorities of Rethel, May 20, 1654.

‡ To M. Lambert, January 3, 1652.

by the renewing of the civil war were not less terrible than the ravages committed in the country by the enemy.

If, indeed, the king's resistance had changed in character, peace was not restored to Paris. There had succeeded to the old parliamentary Fronde a movement having at its head the greater part of the nobility. The great Condé, who, two years previously, had brought the court back to the capital,* now personified the rebellion, and, camping between the Seine and Loire, gave bloody battle to the royal army, commanded by Turenne. Condé said afterwards, when returned to his duty, that he was at this time "the most criminal of men." Desolation on desolation reigned in the country, where the heart-rending scenes which covered with tears Champagne and Picardy were being daily repeated. The transcripts of St. Vincent were not slow in echoing this new distress. "We hear of nothing," we read in one, "but murder, robbery, violations, and sacrileges. The churches are pillaged as much as the frontiers; even the Sacred Host is not respected, but is cast on the ground in order to steal the ciborium. Most of the grain is cut down, the villages are deserted, the pastor and his flock are in flight, and the country people are taking refuge in the woods." As is generally the case in like circumstances, a great number of these poor creatures, not waiting for the help coming to them,

* August 18, 1649. "This very day," Mlle. Le Gras wrote, "our good king arrives in Paris, bringing joy to every heart."

slowly—perhaps on account of the presence of the army—betook themselves to Paris, crowding up the *faubourgs*, and augmenting the misery which three years' incessant trouble had spread in the city.

In May 1652 the number of poor persons who were acknowledged unable to help themselves amounted to ten or twelve thousand, without counting professional beggars. In June and July there were sixteen thousand, and twenty thousand a short time after. The work-shops were at a stand-still; the stores opened only sometimes, or not at all; commerce had ceased, and to the sufferings of those who were in extreme want was added the embarrassment of those who might help them. To give only a few examples: The house of St. Lazarus had lost 23,000 livres of income. The revenue of the Daughters of Charity, levied partly on the coaches,* not running now, was notably reduced; and the deficit of the Hôtel-Dieu was as high as seventy thousand livres.† Nature finally added her scourges to the disasters of human revolutions. The Seine, restrained only by weak embankments, overflowed, so that parts of the city were approachable only by boat, and the pest, which had raged for the past two years, seemed to be a native of France.‡ “There are so many sick in Paris,” Mlle. Le Gras wrote, “it seems we must all die.”

* They had among other things 1200 livres annual rent in perpetuity on the coaches of Rouen, provided by gift from the Duchess of Aiguillon.

† Feillet, “*La Misère au temps de la Fronde.*”

‡ 1650. The pest carried off 22 physicians. (Feillet.)

Her Daughters had never seen so vast a field open to their charity. St. Vincent's letters show what part they took in the good accomplished in Paris, and what assistance they rendered to the sick. "They shelter," he said, "from eight to nine hundred girls and women. They make and distribute soup every day at the house of Mlle. Le Gras to thirteen hundred of the modest poor, and in the Faubourg Saint-Denis to eight hundred refugees." "In the parish of St. Paul alone they help five thousand poor, without counting the sick, and as many elsewhere that would amount to fourteen or fifteen thousand persons, who for six months owe to them their means of subsistence."* To a house of the Sisters in the province he wrote: "Your company has never labored so much nor so usefully."†

The letters of Louise are without details, as they would only redound to her praise. We see that the Sisters, who again took refuge in the mother-house, numerous as they were, could scarcely perform all the services required of them. "We were never," she wrote, "so poor in Sisters, nor so urged to send them." But these public calamities are so many occasions of touching exhortations. The shrine of St. Genevieve was removed and carried in procession through the streets of Paris, to implore a cessation of the war. Alluding to this, Mlle. Le Gras said to her Daughters: "How good it is to be faithful

* Letters of June 21, 1652.

† To the Sisters of Valpuiseaux, June 23, 1652.

to God, who surrounds His servants with so much honor!" Another day, writing to Barbara Angiboust, sending her a louis of twenty-three livres and three sous (which, perhaps, never reached their destination) she writes: "Oh, if we only knew the secrets of God, we should see that this time will be one of the greatest consolation. You share in the necessity, and that is your joy; for if you were in abundance you would grieve to make use of it and see the poor, your lords and masters, suffer; besides, should we not suffer as well as others? Who are we, to believe that we ought to be exempt from public calamity?"

She spoke from experience, for these lines were written in June 1652—in the midst of the war. The Faubourg Saint-Denis had been a dangerous place of abode for several weeks past, on account of the blockade of Paris, the rumors of battles from La Chapelle and Saint-Lazarus, the excitement of the people, and the taking and retaking of Saint-Denis, all of which interested St. Vincent and his people, as he himself said.* The crisis seemed to be reached on the evening of July 1st. The place was surrounded; the army of the Prince of Condé coasted along the grounds of the missionaries, and encamped there for the night. Next day their rear-guard was dispersed by the royalists on the heights of Saint-Martin, but they were afterwards victorious in the Faubourg Saint-Antoine. Some hours later Mlle. Le Gras

* Letter to M. Lambert, May 17, 1652.

wrote a letter to St. Vincent which even now breathes of the emotion of conflict. We quote it almost entire: "This alarm frightens us all; most of the people are moving from the *faubourg*. Shall we not follow their example? It would be a great undertaking for us. If our young Sisters were in danger, we might send them through the parishes, transmitting them provisions as best we might. As for me, I am waiting for death, and cannot help my heart moving whenever I hear them shout, 'To arms!' It seems as if Paris abandons this district; but I trust that God will not abandon it, and that His goodness will show us mercy."

This letter, the only one in which Louise shows any fear, gives us an idea how serious was the situation, and explains the steps she might have been obliged to take. Already one Sister, frightened by the commotion, was sent to the Hôtel-Dieu, where she died. Mlle. Le Gras herself, scarcely able to move, suffered for several months from intermittent fever, which she called her key to get out of this world, and only nourished herself with a little pea-soup. Her Daughters were trembling for her life. Yielding at length to their desires, she hired a little room in the centre of Paris, and there retired; but she could not long resign herself to what she termed her laziness, and after a short rest she was again at her post.

As the removal of Condé's troops left the road free to the country around Paris, St. Vincent arranged a mass-meeting of all the religious Orders. He dispersed

them through the villages. The Jesuits went to Villeneuve-Saint-Georges, and into the cantons of Crosne and Mongeron; the priests of Saint-Nicolas to Brie and Lagny; the Capuchins to Longjumeau and Montlhery; two detachments of priests from Saint-Lazarus to the Beauce—especially to Étampes and Palaiseau, where they found the streets blocked up with corpses in a state of putrefaction, and the inhabitants dying of dysentery and hunger. Some had lived fifteen days on herbs and water; others on army-bread moistened. At Oranges there was not a living soul remaining, but the number of dead were so great that the first duty of the missionaries was to dig trenches and bury the corpses. Some of the missionaries died, but none of them lost courage. Their rivals in devotedness were the Daughters of Charity; they opened kitchens at Étampes Etréchy, Villecousin, Saint-Arnoul, and Gullerval, collected more than six hundred orphans, and nursed the sick. Several of them died, also, of the labor, or, as St. Vincent said, “on the field of battle, sword in hand.” One of them, who had served the sick nearly two years in Picardy and Champagne, died almost neglected in Étampes, where they could not procure a woman to sit up with her; and another, Sister Marie Joseph, not willing to leave her duty, had the sick carried to her room to dress their wounds, which she continued to do, until one day, having finished her task, she fell fainting and never rose.

During this time the Ladies of Charity, who had displayed so much activity since the commencement of the troubles, were multiplied in Paris. As the author of the "History of Mlle. de Lamoignon" says, "God, who permitted, at that time, such public want as had not been seen for several centuries, also raised up more zealous and charitable persons than had appeared in a long time." The Duchess of Aiguillon made an appeal to the public in the name of the company of the Hôtel-Dieu, which was eagerly responded to by all classes of society. The butchers gave six thousand pounds of meat; the bakers and others subscribed still more liberally; and depots were opened in every parish to receive donations of eatables, tools, linen, clothing, materials in the piece to be transformed by the deft fingers of the Sisters of Charity into dresses for the indigent, ornaments for the churches, or soutanes for poor priests."* At length these offerings became centralized in the house of Mme. de Bretonvilliers, at a point of the city whence every month went forth twelve or thirteen thousand livres of charity. The impulse once given, sacrifices were no longer counted. The queen sent jewels of great price to the ladies; the Queen of Poland, with an exhausted treasury, offered twelve thousand livres; the Princess of Conti sent from Languedoc precious stones, valued at fifty thousand crowns; and Mme. de Miramion, not to

* Deposition made at the Beatification of St. Vincent by Sr. Claude Mussot, who had herself worked on these vestments.

mention others, brought a magnificent collar and her silver plate. Everywhere virtue overbalanced ambition, and the most disinterested devotion enlightened the dark horizon of civil war. Misfortunes were coming to an end, however. In October 1652, Condé, weary of defeat, rejoined the Spaniards in Champagne, and the young king entered the city amid the acclamations of the people. The Fronde was vanquished; but it had caused evils difficult to overcome, and, instead of tempering authority, it only prepared the way for the absolute power of the king.

This period, so calamitous and for us so filled with sorrow, had brought to Mlle. Le Gras an overflow of grief. Death, which had so often threatened herself, had now been severing dear bonds and leaving vacant places around her. First of these was the Superioress of the Ladies of Charity, the good Lady President Lamoignon, as she was called, who was taken from the poor on the night of December 30, 1651. "God has taken her from us," wrote Louise to one of her Daughters at Angers,* "to recompense her holy simplicity, her perfect humility, and her great charity. Thus, having prayed for her as the Church ordains, let us beg her to obtain for us these three virtues." In another letter† she shows how great was the popularity of the lady president. "The poor of the parish of Saint-Leu," she relates, "calling to their assistance the *bourgeois*, opposed, by

* Letter to Sr. Cecilia Agnes Angiboust, older sister of Barbara.

† Letter to Sr. Julienne Loret, Jan. 7, 1652.

armed force, the removal of the mortal remains of their Mother. It was her wish to be interred at the Recollets of Saint-Denis ; but her son, M. de Lamoignon, could only carry away her heart to fulfil her desire. The poor insisted that she rest in the vault of their church, which accordingly took place." To this striking testimony to her virtue we may add another which Mlle. Le Gras does not mention, although the intercourse of her daughters with this holy woman made it impossible for her not to be aware of it.* Mme. de Lamoignon had retired to the Convent of the Visitation in the Faubourg Saint-Jacques, to share the grief of her sister, who was a religious. Their mother had died only some days previous, and they were speaking of her, with tears, when a beautiful child came to the turn of the convent-gate and passed in a letter containing only these words: "Servants of God, weep not. God had prolonged her life as much as His justice would permit ; but His mercy is equal to His justice, and mercy urged Him to give to His servant, your mother, the recompense due to her merit." Every effort to discover the child was vain: he disappeared immediately ; and so great was the reverence for the dear departed that many believed this to be surely a message from on high.†

* The rosary used by Mme. de Lamoignon was given by her daughters to Mlle. Le Gras. After her death it was restored by Michel Le Gras to Mme. de Nesmond.

† "Histoire de Mme. de Lamoignon."

Some months were scarcely passed after this sorrow, when Mlle. Le Gras lost the old friend of her youth, the first guide of her soul—Mgr. de Camus. After having left the episcopal chair of Belley and filled the humble post of Vicar-General to the Archbishop of Rouen, he labored in that large diocese at his own cost, and without any assistance from the prelate who then employed* him, and “at length retired to the Hospital of Incurables in Paris.” Voluntarily despoiled of all he had possessed, he lived on charity and served the sick as infirmarian and chaplain† at the same time. His death occurred April 25, 1652. To Mlle. Le Gras this was a blow rendered heavier from the fact that their tender relationship had never ceased, and letters from time to time kept up the union of their thoughts and testified to the fidelity of their remembrances. In the midst of these afflictions God had reserved for His servant a joy long waited for in the sunset of life, and made her think of the drop of honey tasted by Saul which opened his eyes and gave him new vigor. Michel Le Gras had at length fixed his destiny. For a long time he had been the subject of solicitude to his mother, as we see by her letters. Now it was his health, again his salvation, that tormented her. Always on the watch, she became uneasy if he did not send her

* Letter of Mgr. Camus to Mlle. Le Gras, dated Pontoise. (Arch. of the Mission.)

† Notice upon Mgr. Camus, by Mgr. Depéry, Bishop of Gap.

an account of himself every fifteen days. She would write to his friend, Count de Mony, to inquire "if he had the great cross in his room;" if he tried to "overcome melancholy, the source of all his trouble, by occupying himself according to his taste." "He always seems to me," she would write, "to have the fear of God and the desire to acquit himself faithfully of his duty." Without ceasing, she recommended him to the prayers of the Daughters of Charity and the missionaries from Rome, or begged St. Vincent to say a Mass for him, letting him know discreetly the grief caused her by "that person so dear to her." She had ceased to mention him always. Yet, to atone for his faults, she had a picture made from some rings, the last of her jewels. This picture was for an altar dedicated to the Holy Virgin.

The time had come for him to think of settling himself, but circumstances rendered his marriage difficult, and Mlle. Le Gras was obliged to interest herself on that subject with the Marillac family. This was humiliating, and she reproached herself for "her pride" when her son was refused his first position on account "of the small amount she had to give him." "I ought, as a Christian," she said to the Count of Maure,* "love the contempt which ordinarily follows poverty." But the trial was

* Michel Le Gras was also appointed General Treasurer of France in the Bureau of Finance at Riom. He received this charge July 22, 1652, as heir of Charles de Pierrefite, Lord of

short, and soon all difficulty was removed. A short time after the rebuff of which we have just spoken, the future of Michel was settled satisfactorily to his mother by the purchase of a counsellorship at the "Court of Monnaies," and his marriage with Gabrielle Le Clerc, daughter of Nicolas, Lord of Chevières—"a very virtuous young lady," we read in one of Mlle. Le Gras's letters, "whom God has selected for him, it seems, and who is not from Paris."* The contract was signed by St. Vincent and by Adrien le Bon, ancient prior of Saint-Lazarus, and the marriage celebrated January 18, 1650, in the church of Saint-Sauveur. The only fruit of this union was a girl, whom the community of the Faubourg Saint-Denis used to call "the little Sister," sending her cakes "before she had teeth to eat them." Foreseeing that it would not be given to her to initiate this little one in charity, and desirous that this virtue should be eminently practised by her, Mlle. Le Gras soon added a codicil† to her will by which she left to her grand-daughter the sum of eighteen livres to

Bosredon, the last incumbent of the office. Michel resigned this charge the same year, December 31st. The letters-patent, signed by the queen, praise "his loyalty, prudence, diligence," and style him "accomplished in judicature." He was then living in the Rue Saint-Denis, parish of Saint-Eustache. He was also named bailiff of Saint-Lazarus by St. Vincent, who, in quality of his possession of this fief, had the privileges of high jurisdiction; but, becoming deaf in 1656, he had to give this up also. He died in 1696.

* Letter of Mlle. Le Gras to Sr. Jeanne Lepeintre, Jan. 13, 1650.

† May 11, 1656.

be spent by her on a yearly dinner to the poor of the parish, whom she was to serve at table.

The maternal task of Louise was accomplished. From this time she spoke of her family only to God. If the name of her son occurs in her correspondence to her Daughters, it is only to unite him to their thanksgiving. But her spiritual family had not yet, we might say, emerged from its childhood. Hence her life must be exclusively consecrated to it; and we also return to it—to wander no more. ●

CHAPTER XIII.

1652—1655.

The Elect among the Elect—Daughters of Charity in Poland—Hospital of the Name of Jesus—Founding of the General Hospital—Bossuet preaches there the Panegyric of St. Paul—His Opinion of the Daughters of Charity.



THE SORROWFUL years of which we have just spoken had made many ruins; but Providence watched with love over the Servants of the Poor, and the little company had weathered the storm without suffering shipwreck.

It was a manifest mercy that Mlle. Le Gras never tired repeating to her Daughters, saying that their entire life would be too short for gratitude* for themselves and all who took interest in the work. M. Alméras† saw in it a sort of miracle, “which made him think of a letter dictated by St. Bernard in a heavy shower, which letter was not even moistened although the rain poured in all directions around.” M. Portail, recalling all the dangers the Sisters had escaped, especially those to which their virtue had been proof, added: “If there were nothing else, this last protection would be sufficient to show

* To Sr. Anne, July 23, 1649.

† Letter of M. Alméras, then Superior of the house in Rome, to Mlle. Le Gras. (Arch. of the Mission.)

that the institute is truly from God and governed by His hand."* Hence on his return from Marseilles he resumed the direction of the company with renewed courage. After three years of absence he found, it is true, many a vacant place in the company. Many of the Sisters had died ; † but in spite of the troublous times many new ones had joined, and among them elect souls well worthy to take their places beside those whose sweet attractive features we have tried to sketch. We may here remark two young girls, only a few months received, who were both destined one day to be the support of their Sisters and whose zeal distinguished them even now among their companions.

One of these was named Marguerite Chétif, ‡ and was born in the parish of Saint-Sulpice. Lively and ardent, she turned all her energy against herself. When St. Vincent spoke to the community of a fault, her eagerness to kneel was remarkable, and she was often surprised in the act of kissing the floor where a priest had passed. Already she manifested that attachment to the rule which made her silent at Angers, where the climate was ruining her health.

* Mlle. Le Gras, June 8, 1649.

† In another letter, dated May 16, 1649, Mlle. Le Gras tells M. Portail of "the death of the Sisters Turgis, Jeanne Baptist, Salome, Renée d'Angers, Marie Epinale, Elizabeth Martin of Nantes, of good Sr. Madeleine, for a long time Sister-Servant at Angers, and many others" who had entered the company during his absence.

‡ Sept. 8, 1621. She entered the company in 1649, succeeded Mlle. Le Gras as superioress-general, and died 1694.

On the least infringement of the rule, she was accustomed to exclaim, "My God, must our company relax and commence to depart so soon from its first spirit!"

The other, almost a child, but a predestined one, Mathurine Guérin,* had come from a distance. Her first years were spent in a mill in Brittany, where, favored with extraordinary grace, she had made a vow of virginity at eleven, and resisted every persecution to follow her vocation. Exterior gifts were not wanting to her either, as she was handsome, graceful, and intelligent. The administrators of the Hospital of St. John said that "there never was a person so masculine and generous, of such good heart and enlightened mind." Above all, she left behind her, wherever she was, the renown of exalted sanctity. Hence came her ascendancy over all around her, which extended at one time to the commander of the fortress of Belle-Ile,—M. de Chevaligney,—whose conversion and entrance to the Oratory were the result.

* Mathurine Guérin, then seventeen years old, was secretary to Mlle. Le Gras. She was elected the third superioress-general, and governed the company as such three different times, viz., for eighteen years. Deeply imbued with the spirit of the founders, she finished what they had only the time to prepare, and gave the company its perfection. At the age of sixty-four she was attacked by an ulcer, from which she suffered several years, but she was cured by a Novena to St. Vincent de Paul, and she continued for six years longer to serve the poor with her usual activity. (Collet., vol. iv. p. 396, and Conference on the virtues of Sister Mathurine Guérin.)

An older member of the company, for she had made her first vows, was Nicolde Bildet, from Toul, an amiable type of humanity, who when delayed a little at the homes of the poor asked pardon of her companions as for a fault, and who denied herself the pleasure of distributing among them the money she had collected for them.

Each of the others had her distinguishing trait; that of Sister Martha d'Auteuil was love of the sick; she was called the worker of miracles from the numberless cures she performed by her charity. "The most repulsive exhaled, for her, the perfume of roses." * Tenderness for children characterized Sister Frances. Always ready to receive them, she was often seen in the street carrying one or two of the poor little waifs in a creel, her arms heavy from fatigue, but happy and triumphant. Barbara Bailly of Troyes shared with her her labor and her love. During the war of the Fronde she had often directed twelve Sisters and eleven hundred children, displaying, though still young, that spirit of practical ingenuity which afterwards brought Louvois and Mansard † to her to consult concerning a plan for the Infirmary at Les Invalides. We find her again assistant to Mlle. Le Gras

* She died in the odor of sanctity, Nov. 10, 1667, her eyes raised to heaven. When she had breathed her last, her face, which had been worn by sickness, resumed its healthy color, and her limbs remained flexible as in life. ("Conférence sur les vertus de la Sœur Martha d'Auteuil.")

† "Conférence sur les vertus de la Sœur Barbe Bailly."

during her last years, and meriting, by more than half a century of service in the company, to be called one of the Mothers.

Other signs of predestination not less evident were manifested by several of the Sisters. Claude Bonnelle was remarkable for obedience ; becoming blind, she refused to make a pilgrimage to the Holy Face at Laon, in which she felt she would recover her sight, because she could not consult the superiors to get the requisite permission. Two years later, we hasten to record, the pilgrimage was accomplished and the grace obtained. In Marie Prevost, a singular devotion to the Holy Sacrament distinguished her from all around. In Toussainte Allou was remarked a touching simplicity and a fear of never doing enough to pay for her support. Jeanne Marie Ceintereau had such delicacy of conscience that she trembled at the shadow of sin, and an energy unbaffled by all the obstinacy of the Huguenots.

The sweet little Sister Gabrielle had not fought for the faith like Jeanne Marie, but she fought a whole year against her filial affection and grief at leaving her mother. Not less affectionate towards the sick, she wept when she had nothing to give them ; but, fearless in danger, she continued her work for the poor during the overflowing of the Seine. The poor, who saw her indefatigable in labor, performing the duty of two Sisters, looked upon her as a saint.

Such, also, was the impression produced by two Sisters whom God pleased to favor specially by His

grace: Claude Parcolée, who unintentionally confessed to having seen our Lord, surrounded by a circle of precious stones, and who knew beforehand the moment of her death, and Jeanne Bonvillers, who could not hide the favors she received. To see her pray, to hear her speak of things divine, was joy to her companions. One day an awkward servant upset a kettle of water over her shoulders; but to the great admiration of her companions the accident did not disturb her gayety. She accused herself one day of having twice that week lost sight of the presence of God. Not less mistress of her heart than of her mind, when she passed her sister's house she covered her head with an apron, so as not to be stopped on the way to her sick.

If such was the life of these Sisters, what must have been their death! Sister Andrea, in the agony of death, told St. Vincent that her "only remorse was to have too much enjoyed the service of the poor." "What, Sister! is there nothing in your past life to give you trouble?" "No, sir," she said, "nothing at all but to have taken too much satisfaction in that; for when I went through the villages to see the poor people, it seemed to me as if I could not walk; I felt as if I had wings and was flying, so much joy was in my heart at the thought of helping them."* "I never saw a disposition so perfect," St. Vincent said when relating this trait. "From this we must conclude that the com-

* "Conférences de St. Vincent de Paul aux Filles de la Charité," p. 48.

pany is the work of God, since there have been found and are still found in it such beautiful souls."

It was surely the work of God, but St. Vincent did not know the instrument made use of by God in accomplishing the work, and he rendered to Mlle. Le Gras the glory due to himself. The goodness of fruit shows the quality of the tree, but there is also credit due to the gardener.

It was not in vain that Providence shed on the company His choice gifts, for new labors were about to claim their devoted attention. Among the charitable women who were seen, some years before, visiting the halls of the Hôtel-Dieu was the daughter of the Duke of Nevers, Louise Marie de Gonzaga, eldest sister of the celebrated Princess Palatine, whose errors and penitence elicited the eloquence of Bossuet. It seemed as if her destiny had attached her to the court of France; but her marriage with Wladimir Wassa and, after his death, with John Cassimir had placed her on the throne of Poland. John Cassimir had forsaken the Roman purple for that of royalty.* When on the throne this queen practised the same virtues which distinguished the princess. She thought nothing would be better to remove the ignorance and immorality of her people than to beg St. Vincent to send her a number of his missionaries and some Sisters of Charity. Mlle. Le Gras could not supply all the demands from every

* After the death of his wife, disgusted with the throne, John Cassimir returned to his first vocation. He died abbé of Saint-Germain-des-Prés. His tomb is still in that church.

part of France. Nevertheless, like St. Vincent, she knew the voice of God "in this call of a great king and a good queen," in this proposition which opened a field for charity, at once so new and so extensive; and in the month of July 1652, when Paris was still in commotion, she prepared* three of her Sisters for their departure.

Notwithstanding her ordinary strength of soul, this commencement in a far off-land, separate from the hive as it were, filled her with grave anxiety. We may judge of this by her notes, which, incomplete as they are, take up the instructions given to her Daughters. She recalls the virtues which alone would sustain them; the spiritual as well as corporal good they would have to perform in that kingdom where faith is at war with error. She quoted the example and invoked on them the protection of St. Francis Xavier; then, in one of those moments of inspiration common to the elect of God, she exclaimed: "My words are not mine, my Daughters. Oh, what a grace is your vocation! Who can express this grace? Not the angels; none but God! To increase your virtue daily, I beg His goodness to grant you benedictions, extending, not from the east to the west, but from time to eternity, from earth to heaven. Attach yourselves to your rules like a snail to its shell in which it dies before leaving." The Sisters took their departure Sept. 7th, after delaying from week to week waiting

* The Sisters Frances and Marguerite Moreau, and Madeleine Drugeon as Sister-Servant.

ing for the Sisters of St. Mary,* whom the queen had also called to Poland, and who wished to travel with our Sisters. They traversed Protestant Germany without difficulty, everywhere meeting the respect due to their habit, and at the end of the same month arrived in Varsovia.

Alas! the troubles of the Fronde which the Sisters had just passed were nothing to what they were now called on to witness. For four years Poland had been the scene of a war at once political, social, and religious; one of the most disastrous commotions in the history of that country. Guided by a discontented nobility and enrolled in the service of Greco-Russian schismatics, the Cossacks had covered the kingdom with ruins. Churches were fired and towns destroyed everywhere. In some places the entire population had been massacred with a refinement of torture, of which we read with horror the account in the national historians. At length the pestilence, which the same year (1652) carried off 400,000 persons from Poland, attacked the capital, when the queen had the joy to receive the angels of charity sent to her from France.

No measures had as yet been adopted to abate the scourge, and the terror was such that it was not rare to see the sick chased from their dwellings and left to die in the street without medicine or food. On the arrival of the Sisters all that was changed.

* The name given at that time to the Sisters of the Visitation.

M. Lambert, Superior of the Missions,* proposed to transform the public halls into hospitals, transfer the sick into them and leave them to the Sisters of Charity. The proposition was adopted and followed without delay, and the Daughters of Mlle. Le Gras made their début in a strange country in this popular and heroic style. Soon after the queen gave them a part of her palace, which was fitted up to receive poor young girls.† The queen herself (writes one of the Sisters to her companions in Paris) took pleasure in spending whole days in their company, sometimes helping them to nurse the sick, sometimes spinning or dividing the thread for sewing garments for the poor. To economize in order to help the poor, she went so far as to wear broken shoes. She had such affection for Sister Marguerite that she wished to detain her at court while the other two went to Cracovia, where the pestilence had just broken out. The poor Sister remained mute when this was proposed. "What!" said the queen, "you do not answer!" "Madam, I am for the poor; I gave myself to God for them. You will find enough persons to wait on you," replied the generous Sister, and she went to Cracovia with

* M. Lambert was happy in helping the plague-stricken, but he paid for this happiness with his life; dying in Jan. 1653, regretted by every one and regarded as a saint. "Our poor Sisters in Poland," wrote Mlle. Le Gras, "have great need of prayers; for although both king and queen take care of them and are very kind, yet their sorrow must be intense at the loss of such a father."

† "The Daughters in Varsovia have commenced their school. Sister Madeleine succeeded." ("Lettre de St. Vincent," t. iii., pp. 163, 170).

her companions.* So much good accomplished drew down blessings on the French Sisters, and some of the young girls whom they taught wished to join the company. Hence Mlle. Le Gras wrote: "I think if God gives His blessing there will be a large establishment."† While waiting for this time she thought of reinforcing their number, and she wrote: "Since you say you have one heart in three bodies, enlarge that heart, so as to have no distinction between old and new."‡ Help never arrived at a more opportune or more critical moment. A severer crisis than that which had passed was threatening this year.

While the convoy of peace was on the frontiers of the kingdom, the latter was invaded at one and

* Conference of St. Vincent to the Daughters of Charity. Some years later the queen renewed the petition, and Sr. Marguerite wrote to consult Mlle. Le Gras. The question was submitted to the council, and after long deliberation it was decided that the queen should be gratified and Sr. Marguerite might accompany her in her journeys. This holy Daughter crowned her life by a glorious death, having caught the germ of disease in caring for the plague-stricken.

† Letter to Sr. Jeanne Lepeintre, March 26, 1653.

‡ To the Sisters Marguerite, Madeleine, and Frances at Varsovia, Aug. 19, 1655. The Daughters of Charity, wishing to testify their gratitude to the queen, had reared a little dog in Paris which they brought to Poland. Concerning which we read in a letter of St. Vincent: "Mlle. Le Gras brought into the parlor the little dog to be sent to the queen. He loves one of the Daughters of Charity so much that he will look at no one else. The moment she shuts the door he whines and will not rest. This little creature has caused me much confusion, seeing his great affection for her who feeds him. and the little attachment I have for my sovereign good." (April 9, 1655.)

the same time by two armies of Swedes and two of Muscovites, the Swedish army commanded in person by the successor of Gustavus Adolphus. This war, which in a few months made the king of Sweden arbiter of Poland and threatened from that time what took place one hundred years later, has been described in fiery eloquence by Bossuet in the funeral oration of Anne of Gonzaga, sister of Queen Louise. He represents Poland surprised and taken, "like the prey which a lion holds in his claws ready to tear in pieces. Horses are not swift enough nor men skilful enough to flee before the vanquisher. Poland sees herself ravaged at the same time by the rebel Cossack, the infidel Muscovite, and, still worse, by the perfidious Tartar, whom in her despair she had called to her assistance. Every one swims in blood, and we stumble only over dead bodies."

In the midst of these disasters the Daughters of Charity appear for the first time on the battle-field, where the queen, knowing their fearless devotedness, sent them to soften the hard lot of the wounded. A letter from Varsovia during the siege brought the news to St. Vincent, who hastened to communicate it to Mlle. Le Gras and her Daughters. "I shall entertain you to-day with something that will no doubt give you great joy," he said. "What! Daughters of Charity in the army! Sisters from Paris opposite Saint-Lazarus going to visit the poor wounded, not only in France, but even in Poland! Have you ever heard of such a thing, or of

girls going to the army for such a purpose? I never did."

In fact it was an unheard-of spectacle in the seventeenth century. Young French girls on the field of battle caring for the wounded! From the north were Poles and Lithuanians and even Tartars and half savages, a word of whose language they did not understand. History for two hundred years has rendered familiar to us this glory of Christianity, but St. Vincent could then say, "I know of no company which God makes use of to accomplish such great things as yours."

Whilst her Daughters were thus justifying the renown of their virtues, Mlle. Le Gras, in the silence of retreat, was contemplating a new foundation on the subject of which St. Vincent had consulted her, for she still remained his necessary auxiliary in all his enterprises, although she took such pains to conceal herself. The work in question was an asylum of peculiar character, in the erection of which she was to take a prominent part, as the notes found among her papers give us to understand. This establishment was to receive about forty workers, aged or infirm, and give them work proportioned to their strength. It was the thought of a pious citizen who submitted his idea to St. Vincent, and was to bear the title: "Name of Jesus."

Looking at the work, as was her custom, in its entirety, Mlle. Le Gras judged it to be great and excellent, because destined to realize in time the divine plan,

obliging man to eat his bread by the sweat of his brow, and aiding at the same time souls to participate eternally in the merits of the life and death of our Saviour. Passing to practical considerations, which never escaped her, she recommended the choice "of useful trades, the product of which would be easily sold, such as *ferrandine*; * weaving serge, which would serve for the house; making buttons; laces; glove making or ornamenting; fine sewers, who could have the work of large houses; pin-makers, etc." She asks only that they regard not the expense of tools or materials at first to put the work in train, and that the persons chosen to begin it be, if possible, of good condition, but willing to pass for poor, and apply themselves to the work, were it only for six months, so that they might teach the trades to others.

This plan was adopted, and a house prepared in the Faubourg Saint-Laurent to open the foundation.† In March 1653 St. Vincent here installed twenty men and twenty women, lodged in two bodies in separate buildings, but arranged to face each other, so that the pensioners could hear the same Mass or lecture, and have their meals in common, without speaking to or even seeing one another.

* *Ferrandine*, a cloth of silk and wool. The warp was silk, the weft of wool or cotton.

† This foundation became afterwards the Hospital for Incurables (men), who, united to a similar place for women, were transferred to Ivry, near Paris.

The Daughters of Charity were to preside over the interior arrangements, and Mlle. Le Gras was to take the charge.

Useful as this establishment was in itself, it became more so by the great work to which it gave rise. Its good renown was not slow to spread in Paris. The Ladies of Charity came to visit; they appreciated its economy, admired the harmony which reigned among its members, and formed then and there a project whose proportions seemed only made to discourage the most intrepid.

Paris, which had commenced to spread out, was at that time scourged by an evil which justly occupied the attention of all serious minds. Although the whole population was not more than seven hundred thousand* souls, it counted not less than forty thousand vagabonds and beggars.† Wandering about the streets, demanding alms often with a sword by their side, stealing what they could not otherwise obtain, these unfortunate creatures often devised means for attracting the attention by counterfeiting disease, coming even to the foot of the altar to distract the devotion of the faithful. At night they took refuge in what was called the Court of Miracles;‡

* Numbers vary on this point; certain authors give Paris one million inhabitants, others five hundred thousand only. A reckoning of Vauban, quoted by Brien La Tour in the table of the population, is authentic enough (Paris, 1789), from which we would have some years later (1694) 720,000 souls.

† Collet., l. 6, t. 2.

‡ These courts were very numerous. Sauval named the Court of

dens whose dirt and noisomeness nothing now could give any idea of. The largest of these dens, which the others resembled more or less, was entered by the Rue Neuve-Saint-Sauveur, and extended between Cul-de-sac de l'Etoiles and the Rue de Damiette and the Rue des Forges. To enter you must go through a labyrinth of little lanes, muddy and suspicious-looking, then descend a long crooked hill, at the foot of which appeared a place where there was raised in a sort of niche a picture of God the Father, stolen no doubt from some church. Surrounding this was a dozen or more little habitations, as if growing from the ground. Each of these accommodated, pell-mell, more than fifty establishments: which made for that one court more than five hundred families, or at least three thousand inhabitants.* A hideous population, without faith or law, manners or sacraments, always in revolt against the Church and at war with society. "Infidels among the faithful, dead before death itself, reduced to the state of beasts, hunted, wandering, banished vagabonds." This from Bossuet. And as if to make known how difficult was the remedy, Flechier adds: "There was no means of discerning the deserving poor from the

King Francis, and of Sainte-Catherine, Rue Saint-Denis; Brisset, Rue Mortellerie; Gauthier, Rue de la grande Hue-Lue; Jussienne, the street of that name. There were also Rue de Bac, Saint-Antoine, Tournelles, Saint-Roch, à la Croix-Rouge, Good News, Rue des Filles-Dieu, Passage du Marché Saint-Honoré.

* Piganiol de la Force, op. quot.

idle, worthless ones. In giving alms we knew not whether we assuaged misery or encouraged idleness." But the people were satisfied to bear these disorders, as they believed that there was no remedy.

What statesmen could not accomplish, women conceived the idea of undertaking; and what the power of Richelieu could not achieve, his niece resolved to attempt: viz., to snatch this population of misfortune from its dens; to offer it an honest asylum, work, food, and the Gospel. This was the project formed in the mind of the Duchess of Aiguillon by the sight of the hospital "Name of Jesus." The Duchess was then Superioress of the Ladies of Charity and of her friend Mlle. de Lamoignon. Her project was bold, generous, extraordinary, never thought of by any one before, and tending to nothing less than the total extinction of pauperism in Paris. Before speaking to St. Vincent, the ladies wished to talk it over familiarly with Mlle. Le Gras, without whom they never dreamed of undertaking anything. They wished to ask if she thought it beyond their strength. They came therefore to Mlle. Le Gras and told her all their intentions, of which she fully approved. Doubtless, were it a political affair (she answered with her usual good sense), the men might alone be able to accomplish it; but as charity is to be the moving power, women may evidently attempt it, like so many other good works to which they have put their hands. The social character of the measure, however, could not be overlooked; therefore she insisted that

some prudent men might be added to the ladies to guide them in council and to act in law procedure.

All hesitation being ended by these consoling words, the Duchess of Aiguillon in the next assembly of "Charity" made St. Vincent her first overture, which two of her companions supported by promising, one 50,000 and the other 3000 livres of income. The Saint was at first frightened at so gigantic an undertaking, as were also the first President de Pomponne-Bellièvre and the whole Parliament (acquainted early with this design). Nevertheless, after eight hours' reflection, during which he consulted God in prayer, he reconsidered his first impression and promised his assistance. This approbation, experience had already proved, was a guarantee of success.

Very soon the affair was marching along with rapid pace. St. Vincent, by the intervention of the queen, obtained the house of Salpêtrière, situated opposite the Arsenal, which was then unused, and he himself gave the house in Bicêtre, vacant since the departure of the Foundlings. The Cardinal Mazarin sent 100,000 crowns as a first gift; Pomponne de Bellièvre gave a credit of 20,000 crowns on the city; whilst the ladies continued to collect from all parts considerable sums. Thus Mlle. de Lamoignon obtained one day 60,000 livres from Mme. de Bullion, widow of the Superintendent of Finance, on condition that she would carry it herself and keep the secret. The charge was so heavy that the noble beggar, bending under the weight, would not have been able to enter

ner dwelling but for the timely assistance of a friend, who recognized her and hastened to help her. Thanks to all these efforts, the General Hospital was soon erected and celebrated by all contemporaries as a *chef-d'œuvre*,* "one of the greatest creations of the century,"† and "the most wonderful work ever undertaken by the most heroic charity."‡

Two years after, the buildings, etc., were almost finished, and, according to the expression of Bossuet, "the new city was built." M. Abelly, § whose name shall ever be inseparably connected with that of Vincent de Paul, was appointed rector, and the mild Daughters of Mlle. Le Gras installed to receive their guests. Unfortunately, as is often the case in this world, the result was not equal to expectations. In vain a decree of Parliament published with sound of trumpets that all beggars should meet in the court of the old House of Pity, where they would be assigned food, lodging, and work, according to their sex, age, infirmity, or capacity, in one of the seven divisions of the establishment. Instead of obeying this edict, most of them hid away, left the city, or found them-

Patru, "Éloge de Messire Pomponne de Bellièvre."

† Fléchier, Funeral Oration on the Duchess of Aiguillon.

‡ P. Lalemant, Panegyric on the first President of Pomponne-Bellièvre, 1657.

§ Abelly, priest of St. Joseph in Paris, then Bishop of Rodez. He has lent his name to perhaps the best history of St. Vincent de Paul. The work, a collective labor of the Priests of St. Lazare, appeared in 1664, four years after the death of the Saint.

selves suddenly cured of their infirmities : which drew the following from a poet of the time :

“ Wounds healed so soon as these, I ween,
In Paris ne'er before were seen.”*

Five thousand, however, answered to the call. This was an important success and the commencement of a great foundation. The wants of it were numerous ; and Bossuet, then Archbishop of Metz, who took part in the famous “ *Conferences du Mardi*,” instituted by St. Vincent, was invited, a few years after, to preach in the chapel of the General Hospital the panegyric of St. Paul.* The young orator, then little known in Paris, preached on this occasion what we call a Charity sermon. Conjuring his auditors to take pity on so many “ infirm to be supported, ignorant to be instructed, and poor to be helped, does it not seem to you,” he exclaimed, “ that Providence has assembled them in this wonderful hospital that their voices united might be stronger to reach your hearts? Will you not hear them and join so many holy souls who, conducted by your pastor, run to the help of these poor creatures?”

Bossuet, without doubt, alluded to Mlle. Le Gras and her Daughters when he described these ministers of charity. Without them the work would have been impossible. His admiration for them went on

* Jean Loret, “ *Muse historique*.”

† 29 juin 1657.

increasing. Some months after, preaching at Metz,* where eight Sisters of Charity were seen surrounded by their poor, he said: "Assist with all your power, my brethren, that confraternity consecrated to the service of the unfortunate. Help those charitable Daughters whose glory it is to be the servants of the poor sick." Fifty years later, when quoting the virtues of the Daughters as proof of the sanctity of the Father, he wrote to the Pope himself: "We cannot be silent on this company of pious women formed by him [St. Vincent] by means of holy rules; applying themselves to help the sick and poor with so much purity, humility, and charity, that they hinder us from forgetting their founder and the spirit he has infused into them."†

For two centuries the truth of these words has gone through the world for confirmation. The General Hospital has disappeared; but wherever there is a Sister of Charity the poor will think of Vincent de Paul. May they also learn to venerate her who had for him a mother's heart, and who lives still in her Daughters to love and console the poor!


* Nov. 1, 1657. At Metz the work of the Sisters was called "La charité aux bouillons." (Floquet, "Études sur Bossuet," t. i. p. 503.)

† "Neque licet conticere de piarum feminarum cœtu quæ ab ipso sanctissimis Regulis informatæ pauperibus et ægrotis sublevandis tanta castitate, humilitate, charitate serviunt, ut sui institutoris, ab eoque insiti, spiritus oblivisci non sinant." (Letter to Pope Clement XI. to ask the beatification of St. Vincent, Aug. 2, 1702.)

CHAPTER XIV.

1655.

Approbation given by the Ordinary of Paris to the Company of the Daughters of Charity—Session of the Establishment—The Spirit infused by Mlle. Le Gras into her Daughters—Wisdom of her Government.

 **WE** ARE touching on a very important epoch for the Daughters of Charity. We shall see now the society taking foothold in the Church : not as a religious Order—St. Vincent always insisted that it should preserve its secular character, its seal of the parish—but as an institution holy and distinct, having its own life and its special reasons for existing ; occupying a place whose importance we may measure by considering the void which would be left in the world were that society to disappear. Mlle. Le Gras at this time appears to us by her wise legislation and firmness of action, as the real foundress of the company.

The reader will remember the twofold transaction of St. Vincent with ecclesiastical and civil authorities, and the subsequent events—the approbation given by the coadjutor, the letters-patent granted by the king, and the loss of all the papers in 1646. Nor can he forget the painful impression left on the mind of Mlle. Le Gras from the tenor of the lost document.

She feared lest, the Daughters of Charity being withdrawn from the Fathers of the Mission, their spiritual bond of union—such a source of strength in the past—might be severed at some future time.

Her fears on this head had not diminished, and several times she mentioned them to St. Vincent. One day, however, being in prayer, she saw clearly “in a very special light,” she said, “accompanied by great peace and simplicity,” that Providence had given the spiritual and temporal guidance of the company to the Mission; that to withdraw from their guidance would be acting contrary to the will and against the glory of God, and that in such case it would be better to suppress the company altogether.

She believed she ought to communicate this light to St. Vincent; and to give a neater, more precise form to her thoughts she expressed them in writing, adding: “Does it seem to you, most honored Father—it does to me—that God says to you, in the person of St. Peter, ‘It is on your charity I build my company’?” Her conviction was henceforth unshaken, and she tried to impart it to all around her. It even seems probable that, turning to the Holy See, she sought the influence of the queen through her maid of honor, Mlle. Danse, a member of the “Charity,” or through the Duchess of Aiguillon. Otherwise we cannot explain the existence of a letter from Anne of Austria at present in the archives of the house in Rome. This letter sets forth at length the ideas of the foundress. The princess, having

explained to the Holy Father the origin of the Confraternity of Charity, the establishment and growth of a company of "widows and young girls who called themselves Servants of the Poor, being trained to their work by a good and virtuous widow," expresses a fear lest their special dependence on the Archbishop of Paris might awaken distrust in the mind of some bishop. The work being commenced by the General of the Congregation of the Missions, and the Archbishop of Paris having appointed him director for life, would it not be well for His Holiness to secure the permanence of that appointment by naming as perpetual director for the Daughters of Charity the Superior-General of the Mission and his successors?

The result of this letter we know not; but the question was proposed, and for years after Mlle. Le Gras continued with unflinching perseverance to call the attention of St. Vincent to that point. At length one day, she addressed to him a memorial in which she endeavors for the last time to convince him of the urgent necessity for the company to be definitely acknowledged. "During the twenty-six years that I have been by the mercy of God under your guidance, Divine Providence has made me speak to you, on all occasions, freely and with confidence." After having humbly set forth that one of the principal means to strengthen the work was to provide, from that time, a directress who would show a better example, she insists on distributing among the sisters a written

rule that might become the living nourishment of the company. "In fine," she said, "the weakness and levity of the mind has need of a support, such as the sight of a solid establishment, which would strengthen wavering vocations; and the foundations of this solidity, without which it would be impossible for the company to subsist or procure the glory expected by God, must be erected under entire submission to, and dependence upon, the Superior of the Priests of the Mission. The company must be affiliated to theirs, to participate in the good done by them and to live by the spirit which animates them."*

These thoughts, so often already written by her, and which, as she advanced in years, identified themselves with her soul, seemed the voice of God in her, and finally persuaded St. Vincent. He understood the law of Providence, viz., "The same means employed by God to give existence to beings will serve to preserve that existence." In the example of the Saviour taking care of the holy women who, as His followers, administered to the faithful, participating, so to speak, in apostolic functions, he found authority for his missionaries to direct the Daughters of Charity, "engaged like themselves in the assistance and salvation of their neighbors."† Hence he decided to draw up a second re-

* M. Maynard, who had only an incomplete copy of this document, places it in 1646. This is wrong; it is dated July 5, 1651.

† Letter of St. Vincent to M. de la Fosse, Priest of the Mission.

quest and demand from Cardinal de Retz, then at Rome, new approbation for his company, its statutes and rules, with the power, for himself and his successors, of conducting it under the authority of the Archbishop of Paris. The request was granted, and January 18, 1655, the Cardinal erected the company of Daughters of Charity, approved their rules, and placed them definitely under the direction of the Mission.

“Gratefully recognizing,” said the prelate (for it is important to quote here the exact words of an act so decisive for the future), “the benediction of God on the care and labor of our dear and well-beloved Vincent of Paul to succeed in this pious design, we have already confided and committed to him, and by these presents we do confide and commit, the guidance and direction of this aforesaid society and company during his life, and after him to his successors, the Superiors-General of the Congregation of the Mission.”

The destiny of the work was at last fixed, and Mlle. Le Gras, at the climax of her desires, had succeeded by indefatigable efforts in preserving to her Daughters the benefit of an authority which, with unity of action, might secure the stability of the design.

It only remained to announce the good news. The 30th of May following, St. Vincent * assembled the

* In the collection printed 1845 this Conference bears date May 30, without the year, 1655; but doubt seems impossible. Not only is it a conclusion of the text that it took place a little while after the approbation, but St. Vincent said to the Daughters of Charity that

Sisters in conference for this purpose, and made them acquainted with what had been accomplished.* "To the present time, my daughters," he said, "you have labored of yourselves, without other obligation from God than that of fulfilling the order prescribed you and the manner of life given you. To the present you have not been a separate body distinct from the Ladies of Charity;† but now God wishes you to be a distinct body, which, without being totally separate, will yet have its own particular exercises and duties. God wishes you also to be bound more strictly by the approbation He has permitted to be given to your manner of life and rules by my lord the Archbishop of Paris."

The Saint then read a copy of the request he had presented and the approbation he had obtained; he then commenced the reading of the rules, interspersing them with comments. "The

they had practised their rules for twenty-five years; but if we consider the company as formed in 1630, we arrive still and necessarily at the date 1655.

* The Conference quoted by Maynard as being held by St. Vincent on this occasion is only a compound of several Conferences of different dates which he tries to unite. We have had recourse to the original text, of which we give fragments here.

† They were so little separated that, up to the year 1654, St. Vincent had thought of giving them one of the ladies of the Hôtel-Dieu as superioress in case Mlle. Le Gras were taken from them. At the same time in Poland there was question of placing them under a person living intimately with the queen and helping in her good works—Mlle. de Villiers.

first article of your rule says that ‘**The** company shall be composed of widows and girls, who shall elect one among them to be superioress for three years; this superioress may be continued for three more consecutive years, but not longer.’ This is well understood not to take place until after the decease of Mlle. Le Gras.” At these words Mlle. Le Gras cast herself on her knees and begged St. Vincent not to suspend the application of the rule, but release her from a charge for which she was in no wise worthy; but the Saint begged her to be seated and, refusing to enter into her sentiments, expressed a desire that God would leave her to her Daughters still many years. “He commonly preserves by extraordinary means those who are necessary for the accomplishment of His work; and if you take notice, Mademoiselle, you have not been living in the ordinary way for more than ten years.”

He then resumed: “Your confraternity shall bear the name of Sisters of Charity, servants of the sick poor. Oh, what a beautiful title! What high dignity! It is as much as to say Servants of Jesus Christ, since He considers as done to Him what is done for His members. He did nothing Himself but serve the poor. Preserve then, my daughters, preserve with care the title He has given you. It is the most beautiful, the most advantageous you could ever have.”

He then finished the reading of the rule, and added: “Is not what you have just heard, my daughters, that which you have been doing for the last twenty-

five years? You have done it without it being ordained, at least *expressly*; for the late Pope had recommended it to me; but now you will do it because it is enjoined. I have already told you that whoever goes into a vessel to make a long voyage must accept and observe the laws of navigation, otherwise he will be in great danger. The same with persons called by God to live in community: they run great risk of being lost if they do not observe the rule. By the mercy of God, I believe there is not one among you who does not intend to practise them. Is this not true? Are you all so disposed?" "Yes, Father," exclaimed all the Sisters, throwing themselves on their knees. "When Moses gave the law of God to the people of Israel, they were kneeling as you are now. I hope that His infinite mercy may second your desires in giving you grace to accomplish what He demands of you. My daughters, do you give yourselves to God with all your heart to live in the observance of the holy rules He has willed to be given you?" "Yes, Father." "Will you, from your heart, live and die in the observance of them?" "Yes, Father." A touching contest of humility interrupted this dialogue. Several of the Sisters accused themselves aloud of faults against the rule and asked pardon. The Saint humbled himself before them. "I pray God to pardon all your faults, my dear daughters, and I, a miserable creature who do not keep my own rules—I beg His pardon, and yours also, my daughters. How many faults have I committed in

your regard and in what concerns your work! I beg you to ask God's mercy for me, and for that I shall pray our Lord Jesus Christ to give you Himself the benediction. I shall not pronounce the words to-day, because the faults I have committed towards you render me unworthy. I pray God to give it Himself."

Here, continues the narrator, M. Vincent kissed the ground. Mademoiselle and all the others, grieved that their Father refused his blessing, begged it with so much earnestness that he at last consented. "Pray God, then," he answered, "that He regard not my unworthiness nor the many sins of which I am guilty, but show mercy and shed His benediction on you while I pronounce the words." Then raising his voice, he repeated the majestic language consecrated by the Church in her formula: "Benedictio Dei omnipotentis Patris, et Filii et Spiritus Sancti, descendat super vos et maneat semper. Amen." Thus ended that scene, memorable in all the annals of the company.

Two months after, August 8, 1655, a new reunion of almost all the Sisters in Paris was convoked in the parlor of the community. It was held for the purpose of making a solemn act of establishment and to designate the officers. To this effect St. Vincent had a second reading of the rules and the approbation of the Cardinal; then he said that, instead of electing by a plurality of votes as the statute ordained, he judged it necessary for the first

time to act directly and make the choice which occurred to his mind. First addressing Mlle. Le Gras, he asked her to fill the office of Superioress and Directress to the end of her life, as she had done by the mercy and benediction of God since the commencement. He then named Julienne Loret First Assistant; Mathurine Guérin Second Assistant and Treasurer; and Jeanne Gressier Dispenser or Housekeeper.

A statement was then drawn up on parchment, to be seen to this day in the National Archives. The foundress, the officers, and thirty Sisters who knew how to write signed their names, and St. Vincent, who wished to be last, signed it and sealed it with the seal of the company.* A remembrance was given of those who, absent in body, were present in spirit at this reunion, and after the signatures the names of all the Sisters in the community were added. M. Portail was confirmed in his charge of Director of the community.

The work was now settled, we might say; but St. Vincent never relaxed his care and solicitude. Although eighty years old,[†] he continued till the year preceding his death to preside over the instruction of his daughters, assembling them almost every week and explaining untiringly to the assembly, and to each

* This seal, like St. Vincent's own, preserved in the museum of relics of the Mission, represents Jesus Christ with arms extended, as if to receive all who come to Him. Several letters of Mlle. Le Gras bear the same stamp.

one, the rules which were to be their element of strength and the pledge of their stability.

We have elsewhere spoken of those admirable Conferences which for more than twenty years assembled the Daughters on certain days around their Father. Outlines of these Conferences have been preserved to us by the faithful hand of Mlle. Le Gras;* but these are things which cannot be touched without losing their freshness and beauty, and to make a collection of the Conferences, extracting certain passages and leaving or mutilating others, would be a rash enterprise, a kind of sacrilege. In reading them over one can easily perceive with what charity St. Vincent came to the assistance of his Daughters, by repeated explanations, familiar comparisons, and examples taken from the lives of persons he had known, "from King Louis XIII. to the poor laborer on the mountains of Auvergne; from De Berulle to Mme. de Chantal, whom he spoke of as a holy lady." Without being present it would also be almost impossible to give any just idea of the humility of Mlle. Le Gras, always leaving herself aside, never giving her opinion except when formally invited by St. Vincent in this wise: "Mademoiselle, will you please tell us your thoughts?" Then she rose like the others

* It was always she who took the pains to copy them, calling to her aid at times Elizabeth Hellot, or, when she died, Julienne Loret, or Mathurine Guérin. She thought so much of their original simplicity that she would not allow them to be revised, although one of the priests of Saint-Lazarus offered his services for that purpose.

to answer him; nothing could reproduce the touching originality with which some of the Sisters gave account of the prayer they made on the subject given out in the Conference, or their simplicity in asking pardon reciprocally for the faults and the bad example they thought themselves guilty of. We shall then content ourselves with recommending the original text to those of our readers who may have the happiness of being able to reach it.

These instructions and counsels Mlle. Le Gras endeavored to recall and make understood by the Sisters in the little Conferences she gave every week at the mother-house, taking for her subject the Gospel of the day, or oftener some point of rule. "This rule," she would say, "which suffices to make us saints."* She took the Conferences and rules also for the subject of her particular advice, communicated them by letter to the absent, and quoted them once a month to the parish Sisters who were obliged to come to the mother-house to see her and give an account of their employments. She wished above all to imbue the hearts of her Daughters with a knowledge and love of their vocation. "Your spirit," she said, "consists in the love of our Saviour, the source and model of all charity, and in rendering Him all the service in your power, in the persons of old men, infants, the sick, prisoners, or others. When I think of all your happiness, I wonder why God has

* "Recueil de quelques avertissements que Mlle. Le Gras, notre très honorée mère nous a donnés." (Arch. of the Mission.)

chosen you.* What could you desire on earth for your salvation that you have not? You are called by God to employ all your thoughts, words, and actions for His glory."† To correspond to this vocation they ought to labor with zeal for their perfection, joining to their exterior duties the exercises of interior, spiritual life, remembering that, although they are not and never can be religious, they should lead a life as perfect as that of the *most holy* professed in a monastery; making their cloister "a cloister of obedience and not of stone,"‡ in the streets of Paris or on the village roads, and watching more over themselves, as they are more exposed in the world. They ought to be strong-minded women in the right sense, finding no difficulty in labor; open-hearted, cordial, and meek with every one, having nothing constrained, much less affected, in their manners. St. Vincent recommended them and Mlle. Le Gras repeated to them to keep the eyes moderately lowered, for an excess of modesty in this respect might hinder outsiders from the service of God, by frightening them, and thus prevent the good often effected by modest gayety.§

Devoted to the service of others, they must prefer the interest of their neighbor to their own or to that of the company. "This has been taught us by our

* Letter to Sr. Claude Brigitte, without date.

† Letter to Sr. Nicole Haran, Aug. 30, 1659.

‡ Letters to the Sisters at Richelieu, not dated.

§ "Recueil des Conférences."

honored Father, who learned it from Jesus Christ." * Such is the general principle. "Neighbor is, however, a multiple term, comprehending at the same time the poor, the Ladies of Charity, administrators of hospitals, confessors, doctors, worldly people, companions; towards all these you have divers duties." Mlle. Le Gras returns untiringly to the task, distinguishing, shading, adapting with her perfect tact these precepts to the wants and circumstances of the occasion. She never made a body of her laws, but scattered them abundantly through her writings. From these writings we shall try to gather the substance faithfully, being only the echo of her words, and preserving as often as possible her own expressions.

"The poor before all; a Sister of Charity belongs to God for their service, and she should prefer their company to that of the rich, leaving her prayers and rules to fly to their assistance. All this when necessary and not of her own will."† She must serve them with patience and humility, meekness and respect, as the members of Jesus Christ and as her lords, managing well for them and never appropriating the least part of what has been given her for them.

In regard to the ladies who have been enrolled in the "Charity," "we must treat them with the

* Letter of Mlle. Le Gras to Sr. Anne Elizabeth, at Montreuil-sur-mer.

† Letter to Sr. Jeanne Lepeintre.

greatest respect, looking on them as the mothers of our masters the poor, and remembering that they oblige us very much in allowing us to be with them in the service. At the same time we must receive their visits, as made to the sick, *in the wards and not in our rooms*, and never form any bond of attachment with them for fear of losing our time." Deference towards the administrators was no less recommended. "We must guard against giving them occasion to accuse us of arrogance or self-sufficiency," for "you have no power of yourselves." Mlle. Le Gras said to her daughters, "You are subject to every one, you are the last of all. As to priests, speak to them with great respect, never anywhere but in the church or at the door of the house; we must not abuse their kindness." The rule requires that Sisters sent to the parishes must, on their arrival, go to receive on their knees the blessing of the priest, and they should consider the confessor as sent by God, treating him always with almost the same veneration as when he is at the holy altar. Hence the necessity of surmounting any repugnance or difficulty they might feel to open their hearts to him. "Remember," she says in a letter to Jeanne Lepeintre, "Teresa, that great saint, often had need of advice in very different affairs from yours, yet she asked it quite freely with simplicity and humility from the persons sent her by Providence as directors, contenting herself with what was necessary, leaving the rest to the wisdom of God." She says elsewhere, "The

Sisters may, however, go from time to time to an extraordinary confessor, but not often in the year; our most honored Father in the last Conference cautioned us strictly against *these little amusements*."

The world must not be frequented without pressing reasons. "It reproaches us sometimes for being wanting in certain compliments which we do not owe it; but it is edified afterwards, when it finds that it is virtue which makes us indifferent, while it remarks severely those who allow themselves to be gained over by its applause." The Sisters should therefore avoid all useless visits; they should not amuse themselves, according to the pithy expression of their Mother, in gadding about, but prefer the company of their companions to all other. "If you need other entertainments or other consolations than those found with our Saviour, find them among yourselves." On this point Mlle. Le Gras is inexhaustible, and her recommendations are multiplied to infinity. There above all is the place to exercise what she called "our dear virtue, cordiality."* Serenity of countenance, modest smiles, gracious words exchanged when the Sisters meet; eagerness to accept the advice of a companion, or to do what she desires, are so many means which the wise directress suggested to her Daughters to strengthen the bonds of holy sisterhood. "The blessing of God is known by support, by cordiality, . . . so necessary to the per-

* Letter to Sr. Jeanne Lepinetre, Jan. 13, 1650.

fect union of Daughters of Charity.”* In another place she writes: “If humility, simplicity, and charity which give support are well established among you, there will be in your little company as many saints as there are persons who compose it.” Again she writes: “I seem to see you in great peace and union, communicating one to the other what you have been doing when separated, where you went when out, etc.; one by the obligation of submission, and the other by the obligation of support and complaisance.” These counsels occur on almost every page, without Mlle. Le Gras having occasion to complain of not seeing them observed. On the contrary, she had reason to rejoice at sight of the community. “God be blessed for the good understanding and holy peace which is among you! This is the way to live as true Daughters of Charity.”

But seeing that, as St. Vincent reflects, “there is not much affection for what concerns us not,” the Sisters should carefully preserve, as a symbol of unity, all the customs of the mother-house; whither they shall come also from time to time to reanimate themselves with the spirit of the company. Thus to quote but one example. The Sisters sent to Arras asked permission “to wear their capes like the women of the country, for with their little head-dress they were as strange as beings of another world.” They were answered, however, to “guard well against that. Strangers never change their garments when they

* Letter to Sr. Madeleine at Angers, March 16, 1645.

went to a place where every one was astonished to see them in such a garb. The Poles, for instance, were well received in Paris dressed in their own fashion, and no one thought it ill of them to dress so when they came to see their queen." Nourishment must also be uniform in its simplicity, and wine for the most part excluded. St. Vincent, remembering no doubt his captivity, said: "The Turks, who never drink, are stronger than we are." Singularity should not exist in books of devotion, which should be few. The "'Imitation,' a prayer-book,* the rule, and 'Philothea' or 'Love of God,' and you have the library of a Sister of Charity.† Her breviary is her beads. Mlle. Le Gras wrote one day to a sister: "I send you a prayer-book of the kind we use here. We must in all things practise what appertains to our vocation; that is to say, the poverty of our Lord and His holy Mother."

In the eyes of the holy foundress poverty was the base of the company, and she recommended it earnestly to her Daughters. Her most constant wish was that the company would be maintained in the poverty and frugality which she judged necessary for its conservation. Thus to speak only of habitation, to those who found themselves in a fine house she recalled the fact that all "they owned in it

* "Our first and holy Sisters contented themselves with the words of the 'Imitation of Christ' and a prayer-book." (Circular, March 1, 1738.)

† Letter of Mlle. Le Gras.

was their living and a shelter." To others, obliged to prepare their own dwelling, she advised to "make choice of the lodgings of poor girls."* When she was obliged herself to have an addition to the house, she wrote to the architect: "It is absolutely necessary that this building appear as simple and as contracted as possible, for the company, to endure, must appear in all things poor and humble."

For the rest, Mlle. Le Gras did not confine herself to general counsels, of which we must say we do not pretend to give a complete outline; for each of her Daughters she had special directions, varied according to character and natural gifts, which she took care to esteem as "a gift of God for accomplishing good." Very exacting, we might say, with those in whom she perceived a call to perfection, she showed astonishing patience and indulgence for the weak, and her conduct was often justified by the improvement of those who were the subjects of her quiet zeal. How many Sisters, apparently incorrigible, have been led by her to good!†

God had given her great discernment of souls and light which eminent men, such as the Abbé Vaux, disdained not to invoke for the guidance of their conduct.‡ In rendering account of this divine gift, she said she thought she could clearly see the disposition of her neighbor, especially of the company; but

* Letter of Sr. Mathurine Guerin to Sr. Marguerite Chétif.

† Ibid.

‡ Letter of Mlle. Le Gras to the l'Abbé de Vaux, March 10, 1643.

in her humility she saw in this only a fault to accuse herself of. During a retreat we find her asking herself what means to apply as a remedy for her quickness in seeing the faults of others, reprehending them and annoying herself about them. She loved them to come to her simply, and she assisted them to open their hearts, especially those who were tried or suffering; and by her prudence and good management often, without intending, she also led them to see their own failings.*

This quality of foundress she possessed in a remarkable degree. St. Vincent de Paul said he had never met with a more prudent person, and in the assembly held a few months before her death,† he could not avoid praising publicly and in her presence the wisdom of her government. He feared not to assert that no community in Paris was in as good a state as that of the Daughters of Charity, and like them out of debt; they alone asked for no help; and while the Daughters of Mary had to bring twelve or thirteen hundred livres, they had no other dowry than the poor and Providence. The company, however, was prospering, he would remark; and Mlle. had also found means by her economy, notwithstanding the expense of a recent building, to secure some rents on the coaches and elsewhere. St. Vincent might have added that she had obtained these results without the slightest departure from the rule

* Conference upon the virtues of Mlle. Le Gras.

† July 31, 1659.

of disinterestedness he had so implicitly traced for her ; counselling her not to demand a debt contracted by a lady so great as the Duchess of Mortemart.*

The prudence which directed so happily Mlle. Le Gras when only the material subsistence of the community was in question, was still more necessary to inspire her conduct in the other and higher existence of all religious communities, the maintenance of rule and unity of purpose. We shall quote but two examples of this. The first is furnished by a serious affair which for several months saddened the hospital of Chars near Pontoise, where the wife of President Herse had established the Sisters. At the end of some years of service they found themselves under a Jansenist priest, who, after removing their confessor, refused them communion and endeavored to compel them, by threats of public penance at the church-door, to yield to his orders in practices contrary to the rules of the company, such as to receive strangers into their houses, and in their instruction of children to use means of correction which had been justly banished from their schools. Mlle. Le Gras bore it patiently at first, and tried every means to secure the tranquillity and liberty of her sisters ; but she feared for her Daughters the contagion of doctrines and maxims

* It was a question of expense for one of her children, Athenais, afterwards Marchioness of Montespan, who at the age of fifteen had been with the Sisters of Charity. St. Vincent took occasion from their loss to counsel them never to admit the rich as boarders. (Assembly of March 22.)

opposed to the spirit of the Church, and she recalled them,* although by so doing she had to risk the displeasure of one of her devoted friends. The second example is more striking still, as the jealous care she took to protect the integrity of the rules led her to sustain her authority in opposition to M. Portail himself, who seemed to misunderstand the circumstance. We are ignorant of all the details, but their letters† fortunately are extant to witness to the respectful, prudent firmness of the foundress and the humility, at the same time, of the director, and their mutual desire to end a difference which had not for one moment changed the cordiality of their intercourse.

The prudence which Mlle. Le Gras practised in such perfection was not the special signet she wished to imprint on her community. "I know not if I am deceived," she said, "but it seems to me our Lord wants more confidence than prudence to maintain the company, and confidence will act prudently without perceiving it. Experience has often proved this to me when the laziness of my mind needed it."‡ Confidence, simplicity, cordiality—such is the spirit which Mlle. Le Gras sought to instil into her Daughters; and we must say to their praise, it is that which has accompanied them all through their history, and which is their distinguishing trait to-day.

* Letters, not dated, of Mlle. Le Gras to the wife of President Herse, and to the Curé de Chars.

† Letters of Mlle. Le Gras to M. Portail, not dated, and his answers.

‡ Letter dated August 8, 1656.

CHAPTER XV.

1657—1659.

Louis XIV. recognizes the Existence of the Company—Developments of the Work in France—The Daughters of Charity in the Army—They are asked for in Madagascar—Death of Mlle. Pollalion and Barbara Angiboust.



Mlle. LE GRAS had accomplished her task. She had secured to her Daughters the existence of their society and the exercise of their functions, and also removed, as far as possible, all uneasiness that might trouble their minds with regard to the future. No more remained for her to do but to gather the fruits of her labor, and while watching unceasingly the interior organization of the company, to direct its extension outside.

Tuesday of Pentecost week, 1657, the term of the officers appointed directly by St. Vincent having expired, the first election was held. This was conducted by the Sisters themselves as the statute required. The Saint urged upon them the importance of making a good selection, and enumerated the qualities necessary to exercise the duties of each office; then, in conformity to the method followed by the Apostles, he proposed two names for each

The names were submitted to every Sister of four* years' vocation; and after having addressed a prayer aloud that God would let them know whom He had selected from all eternity, he took the votes. Sister Jeanne of the Cross was chosen first assistant, Genevieve Poisson treasurer, and Madeleine Mesnage, dispenser. As soon as the names were read out, one of the officers rose from her place and, throwing herself on her knees, asked pardon for the faults she had committed in the exercise of her charge. "May God bless you, my daughter!" replied the Saint, "Mlle. Le Gras gives me a very good account of you and your conduct, as also of the two others. May God be glorified in it! You did right to ask pardon of your Sisters for the bad example you think you have given them; for it is very difficult to act so well as to leave nothing to be said against you. Besides, it is a custom among the Sisters of Mary when leaving their charge." The two other officers then followed the example of the first, and the Saint gave them for a penance to recite the Litany of the Holy Name of Jesus, and to hear the next day's Mass for the intention of the newly elected.

While the work was thus taking a regular course in its interior, it received a sanction long looked for, and one that already was making its future bright. The civil authority had by degrees become accustomed to the secular character which St. Vincent had endeavored to preserve in the community;

* Afterwards eight years' vocation was required.

although at first the magistrates, even those most in its favor,* were astonished. Success, therefore, crowned the efforts which Mlle. Le Gras had not ceased to make since the loss of the papers. The royal favor and approbation were obtained. The terms of the ordinance read: "Nov. 1657. The king, desirous of favoring all the good works in his kingdom for the glory of God, and rendering homage to the new confraternity which 'had had its commencement so filled with benediction, and its progress so abundant in Charity,' authorizes it to extend itself in all the states subject to his obedience. He takes it under his special protection and that of his successors, permits it to receive donations and legacies, and grants it considerable privileges and exemptions."†

Royal protection only confirmed public opinion. All over the kingdom the name of the Daughters of Charity commenced to be heard. "It pleases God," said Mlle. Le Gras, "to give renown to what the Sisters have been doing for a long time unnoticed;" and St. Vincent wrote: "You cannot believe how God blesses these poor Sisters wherever they go. The other day I asked a priest who has them in his parish how they were doing, and I dare not repeat all the good he told me of them. The same with others; some more, some less. Not that they do not commit faults; alas! who does not?

* Letter of Mlle. Le Gras to St. Vincent, April, 1650.

† Letters-patent registered in Parliament, Dec. 16, 1658. (Arch. Nat., Carton L, 1054.)

But they never tire of acts of mercy, which is the characteristic of God. Thus they are in repute everywhere." The Saint continues: "A bishop wants them for three hospitals; another requests them for two hospitals; a third, also, who spoke to me but three days ago, is urging me to send them to him." In another letter he enters more into details: Mgr. the bishop of St. Malo does too much honor to the poor Daughters of Charity in wishing to employ them in his town; but that cannot be at present, for Mlle. Le Gras has no one ready to go, and cannot supply those who have been asking for them a long time. Mgr. the bishop of Cahors* is earnest in his solicitations; Mgr. d'Agde† asks them for his city and for Pezenas; for two years the Abbé Cyron is waiting for for them in Toulouse; the bishop of Angers wants them for a new hospital;‡ and the Chancellor, adds Mlle. Le Gras, "for an establishment one hundred and fifty miles from here."§ Nor was this yet all. The Ladies of Charity when they went to pass the summer in the country—"aux champs," in the fields, as was then said—often wanted the Sisters for the poor people on the domain;|| finally, the Sisters themselves, overbur-

* "For four years Mgr. of Cahors has been asking with such earnestness that he is angry with me because Mlle. Le Gras had not the means of satisfying his desire." (Instructions given by M. Vincent, November 4, 1658, to the Sisters leaving for Cahors.)

† Mgr. Fouquet, brother of the Superintendent of Finance.

‡ To the Superior of St. Meen, June 14, 1656.

§ Letter of Mlle. Le Gras.

|| In this way Mme. Fouquet generally brought a Sister to Vaux.

dened with work notwithstanding their courage, were asking for reinforcements. "Sir," wrote one of them to St. Vincent, "we are overloaded with labor, and we must succumb if not assisted. I am constrained to write these few lines at night, guarding the sick, having had no rest during the day; and as I write I have two dying patients to attend to. I go to one and say, 'My friend, raise your heart to God; ask His mercy;' then I come and write a word or two, and run to the other to say, 'Jesus! Mary! my God! I hope in you,' and return to my letter. Thus I come and go, and write in between, having my mind quite divided." But not forgetting the end in view, she concludes thus: "I beg you most humbly to send us another Sister."

Alas! Mlle. Le Gras was obliged to reject most of these requests. A sorrowful task, for it grieved her to see so large a harvest whitening and so few gleaners. "Ask our Lord for laborers for His work," she repeated to her Daughters, and she tried to establish in some diocese in the middle of France, at Agde or Cahors, a seminary independent of the house in Paris, the advantage of which would be to recruit new subjects and be able more easily to furnish Sisters for more distant places.* With all this insufficiency of numbers, she managed to send Sisters to the Insane Hospital, called the "Little Houses," at Paris; Varèse, in the diocese of Chartres; to the hospital at Fère, "where

* Council held April 25, 1656.

they soon became the edification of the whole city ;" to Cahors; to Metz, where the queen wanted them to make known the sanctity of the Catholic religion to heretics and Jews, numerous in that city.* She sent two Sisters to the Duchess of Ventadour for her estate back of Sainte-Marie-du-Mont, in lower Normandy,† and two for the hospital of Ussel, in Limousin. She promised three to Narbonne, six to Saint-Menehould, and several to Alise in Burgundy, where St. Vincent undertook the construction of an hospital for all pilgrims and infirm persons attracted to the warm springs or the tomb of St. Reine. These new foundations swelled the number of provincial establishments to thirty-four, to which we must add the five hospitals of Paris and the twenty-six parishes of that city where the sick were attended in their own dwellings.

Besides the hospitals, schools, and houses of mercy in the parishes, the Sisters of Charity were called on to nurse the sick and wounded soldiers. Already at Sedan, 1654, and at Arras, 1656, they had made their first campaigns, "praying to God for the king's army and the enemy's conversion; for we are under too much obligation to our dear France to need any recommendation from me to

* Instructions given to the Sisters on their departure for Metz.

† "These poor girls!" wrote Mlle. Le Gras, testifying to their fidelity to God, "they are fifteen miles from Caen, and no camp or other messenger goes there. Thus they are sometimes three months without hearing from us, and our letters are often lost; nevertheless they live as if they were with us." (Jan. 8, 1657.)

you," said their Mother. After the taking of Dunkerque from the Spaniards, the queen ordered them to Calais, where six hundred wounded soldiers were being decimated by an epidemic; the young king himself being attacked by it also. Some touching details remain of the departure of those destined for this post of honor. All the Sisters were assembled in the parlor where so many separations had already been witnessed. The four departing were standing around Mlle. Le Gras, and were taking leave of St. Vincent, whom most of them would see no more on earth. The Saint was so deeply impressed with the greatness of their mission that he could scarcely speak. "What a subject of humiliation, my daughters," he tried to say—"what a subject of humiliation for you that God wills to be served by you in such great things! Men go to war to kill; and you—you go to repair the evil which they do. In killing the body they often, also, kill the soul; and you—you go to give your life for the one and for the other." Then, as if moved by a secret presentiment: "When you are in the midst of the battle, have no fear; if one of you should lose her life—oh! would it not be a blessing for her?" These words were spoken with such a tone of certainty that Sister Claude Muset, a little fearful of this mission, felt all her fears vanish like smoke, and she set out with joy. This she stated at the process of his canonization.

All four were chosen from the strongest and most robust of the company; yet, a short time after

their arrival, one of the number, Frances, died, and the three others, dangerously sick, had to be carried to a convent of the Dominicans. At this news twenty of their companions in Paris offered to replace them, making their offering with such ardor and enthusiasm that Mlle. Le Gras compared it to that of soldiers at the call of battle. One old Sister among the rest, Henrietta Gesseume, burning with the desire of risking her life, called on St. Vincent at the Hôtel-Dieu at a time when she was sure of meeting him there, and entreated his permission to make one of the party for the scene of war. En route for Calais she heard that Sister Marguerite had become a second victim. "Sister Marguerite is dead also, sword in hand.* It takes more than that to discourage us," she wrote to Mlle. Le Gras.† "On the contrary, we are longing to arrive, to assist the poor soldiers stretched on the ground on a little straw—a pitiful sight, they say." Thus the pious battalion moved on with new ardor to the combat.

Still another apostolate appeared in the horizon. Not only the ambulance-halls of France and Poland demand the valiant Daughters of Mlle. Le Gras, but the far-distant isles of the Indian Ocean. "Your name," Saint Vincent had said to them one day, "is spread abroad; it is known in Madagascar, where

* Letter of Mlle. Le Gras. The queen raised a monument at her own expense, on which she had engraven the names of the two Sisters and that of St. Vincent de Paul.

† Aug. 8, 1658.

you have been asked for, and our missionaries who are there write to us that it would be well if you had an establishment there to gain the souls of the poor negroes." *

These words were not premeditated, but Mlle. Le Gras took them as a hope. "Oh, what a blessed journey!" she exclaimed. "I think it is not more than ten or twelve hundred miles!" And she asked, laughing, "Would that be enough to frighten Sister Henriette?" † At all events it did not frighten Sister Nicole Haran, ‡ who, at Nantes, had collected the ruins of a shipwreck from which three missionaries miraculously escaped; they were going, moreover, to Madagascar. § Nevertheless she wrote to St. Vincent that she felt urged to go and serve God in that abandoned place. She was far from being the only one, for Mlle. Le Gras hesitated not to say, "The greater number of our Sisters do not wish the journey to Madagascar to be made without them." | Here we have precisely the Sister of Charity of the

* "Recueil des Conférences."

† Letter to a Sister.

‡ Sister Nicole Haran was elected Second Superioress of the Sisters of Charity.

§ The *Gazette de France* speaks of this miraculous preservation, "attributed, they say, to the faith of a Mission Brother." This Brother, called Christopher, had constructed a raft, with his mantle for sail, and, his crucifix in his hand, he directed this frail skiff and kept up the courage of his companions. The other passengers, 120 persons, and everything in the wreck, perished in the waves.

| Letter to St. Vincent, Jan. 1658.

nineteenth century, and such as the foundress loved—ready for everything, armed with strong confidence in God, abandoned to Him to do whatever He wills, minding no office or duty, neither low nor high nor difficult.* The Saint blessed the Lord for courage so extraordinary in poor village girls, and, like St. Benedict on the heights of Mt. Cassin foreseeing in a ray of light the future of his Order, he also perceived from the heart of Paris the extension of his work all over the world. “The day will come,” he said to the Sisters, “when God will send you to Africa and the Indies.” But he did not believe the hour had arrived, and events justified his prudence; for, driven by the tempest into the port of Lisbon, the missionaries fell into the hands of the Spaniards, and having put to sea the year after, their vessel went to pieces on a rock.

While the Sisters of Charity were thus shedding the odor of virtue everywhere, the trunk of the parent-tree, the confraternity whose name they bore, was receiving a cruel blow. Mlle. Pollalion had just died. This faithful friend of Mlle. Le Gras, whose name brings us back to the laborious years of their apostolic course, had also founded a spiritual family; † but at the cost of what efforts and what sacrifices! Her historian says she went from house to

* Counsels quoted by Mathurine Guerin.

† The Daughters of Providence, or of Christian Union, Rue d'Arbelète, from which arose the community of New Converts in the quarter Saint-Germain.

house begging, often eating only a morsel of bread picked up in haste as she went along to save time, sometimes after thirty hours' absolute fast. She spent a great part of the night in prayer, and in winter she was often seen making a pilgrimage bare-foot to Aubervilliers,* that she might obtain from God the sanctification of her Daughters and the preservation of the king. Finding her end approaching, she had herself carried on a litter from Rouen, where she had been on business, to her house in Paris, and had scarcely arrived in the chapel of the convent itself, where she had just time to receive Extreme Unction, before she expired.†

One of the Daughters of Charity that Mlle. Pollalion had known in the little house of the Faubourg Saint-Victor when, during the absence of Mlle. Le Gras, she took her place, went to join her soon after in eternity. This was no other than Barbara Angiboust, who, after devoting herself in Champagne to the victims of the war, had successively founded establishments at Bernay, in Nor-

* Notre Dame des Vertus (that is to say, of miracles), at Aubervilliers, was a great devotion in the seventeenth century. M. Olier went there to consult God before commencing his foundations. He went again every year, and came back to Paris by way of Saint-Lazarus.

† The universal martyrology gives her the title of Venerable, and the Archbishop of Paris, convinced of her sanctity, substituted the Mass of the Holy Trinity for the Mass of Requiem usually said on the anniversary of her death. ("Vie de la vénérable servante de Dieu Marie Lumagne, veuve de M. Pollalion, etc." Paris, chez Hérisant, à la croix d'or et aux trois vertus, 1744.)

mandy, and at Châteaudun. Attacked by a malady which permitted her not to communicate, she asked to have the Blessed Sacrament brought to her room, and adored it with transports. Then she called around her bed of suffering the little children brought up in the hospice, to exhort them to piety ; and the Sisters, to encourage them to spare nothing in the service of the poor. After her death* she looked so wonderfully beautiful that the women of the city, who came in crowds to lay their beads on her body, asked if she were not painted. So great was the concourse of people that the gates had to be shut against them.

"Barbara," wrote Mlle. Le Gras, "was one of the oldest and most faithful of the company, and God had honored her in her sickness with the most striking marks of being His servant, commencing thus in this world to recompense her fidelity." On this consideration she wished not only to recommend her to the prayers of the whole congregation, as she did each of the Sisters deceased, but she wished a special veneration and attachment shown her. For this purpose she summoned all the Sisters to a High Mass chanted in the church of the Missionaries, and to a Conference in which the virtues of Sister Barbara were made the subject of reflection, such Conference being only held for the most holy. Two of her companions came from Châteaudun to recount the traits of virtue which they had wit-

* Dec. 27, 1658.

nessed ; afterwards each of those who had known her in Paris or elsewhere expatiated on what they had seen in her. They praised particularly her firmness in executing the orders given her, her exactness to rule, her detachment from everything, her generosity in treading under foot all human respect. When it came Mlle. Le Gras' turn to speak, she treated of her meekness, and related a circumstance which had come under her own observation of the affability and kindness shown by Barbara to a Sister who had committed pretty serious faults against her. "What!" she answered when the other asked pardon, "shall I not suffer something from you when you have so much to suffer from me?" After this trait, which seemed to support the counsel ordinarily given by Mlle. Le Gras, she summed up all that had been just said of this holy life: "See, my dear Sisters, if it is not well to persevere in the love of God."*

Alas! these beautiful fruits dropping from the tree indicated but too surely the approach of autumn. These successive losses were only so many precursory signs of that which was threatening and would soon spread sorrow and desolation throughout the company.

* Letter to Sr. Anne Ardumont, November 13, 1659.

CHAPTER XVI.

1659—1660.

Last Illness of Mlle. Le Gras—Her Death—Her Funeral—Her Tomb.



AMONG the masterpieces of modern art is one representing a mother, a saint, already transfigured, her features worn by suffering and transparent as her veil; her eyes fixed on heaven, holding on to earth only by the hand of her son, she is ready to depart and ripe for eternity. Such, in this moment, appears the venerable woman whose life we have endeavored to retrace. Her soul on high, she seems detained on earth only by her love for her Daughters; the day will come when that tie shall no longer arrest her flight.

Several times of late years Mlle. Le Gras had made an apprenticeship of death, or, as we might say, a trial of it. In May 1656 she was expected surely to die; but our Lord "drew her out of the agony," as she said herself, and "she had to be resigned to a prolongation of her exile."* "It did not please the goodness of God to blot me out of the earth, although I have merited such for a long

* Letter to the Abbé Vaux, June 14, 1656.

time"—she wrote to Sister Françoise de Mesnage*—"and I must wait the order of His providence." A private note† informs us how she was to wait. "Recovering from my late severe sickness, I asked M. Vincent, our most honored Father, with what disposition I should take up the resolution of living longer, and his charity told me—with the resolution to deny my satisfactions and renounce myself." This advice astonishes our tepidity, since life for many years had been perpetual suffering for her—and we know not what else she had to conquer in this respect. But God, so merciful to our weakness, has, in regard to the saints, requirements whose extent our ignorance cannot measure, often advancing the work of their sanctification by multiplying exterior accidents, privations, and sorrows.

It was to be thus with Mlle. Le Gras. Some weeks after this a severe fall left long and cruel traces. The following year she had a swelling on her shoulder which was treated by bleeding—a remedy much in vogue her time, the abuse of which was often more fatal than the disease itself. Finally, on August 22, 1657, she wrote that she had been very ill; and in July 1659, that she was still alive, but almost in constant relapses since Easter. Yet she did not interrupt her vigilance, requiring strict account from her first assistant of the prayers of the community and their exactitude, and being filled with joy to hear the Sisters repairing to the chapel in the morning. On the

* June 10, 1656.

† Oct. 30, 1656.

least respite from suffering she was at work immediately. Possessed with the idea that something more was wanting regarding the spirituality of the company, she drew up a memorial on the subject and sent it to St. Vincent. She superintended the construction of a new building, for which Providence more than once sent her money on the very day she had to pay the workmen. She continued also to direct retreats for ladies; one worthy of remark at this time was that of the Baroness Mirepoix, who after her retreat went to work with the Ladies of Charity.

She had always been tormented by the fear of not having the assistance of St. Vincent at her last moments. One word from him could dissipate her greatest alarm and calm her wildest terrors. Those who have read St. Vincent's life have found Mme. de Gondy possessed by the same fear. The great age and declining health of St. Vincent justified this disquietude on the part of Louise. He had attained his eighty-fifth year, but that did not deter him from rising every day at four o'clock in the morning, fasting rigorously, and sleeping on a single straw-mattress; but his limbs could with difficulty support him. Thus he had to discontinue his visits to the community of the Daughters of Charity, although so near. Soon after, to complete the sacrifice, he could not descend to the parlor of Saint-Lazarus for the Conferences,* and at length he appeared no longer, even

* The last was held Dec. 14, 1659.

in the chapel. The grief of Mlle. Le Gras at this expected separation is easy to understand. "I have nothing to offer to our Lord," she said, * "if not the only consolation which His goodness had given me for thirty-five years."

Correspondence with this faithful guide of her life, who since her vocation had held a large space in her existence, was now her only resource; and yet St. Vincent answered rarely, although it required no long letters. "The poor are content with little." "Visits and business increased so much that with difficulty we could have an answer. See to what a state it pleases Divine Providence to bring us." Yet, always submissive, she adds: "I accept it for His love, in the way He ordains. May His good pleasure be for ever accomplished! It seems to me that our Divine Lord has put me in a state to suffer henceforth everything in peace." † This resignation was more than ever beneficent and necessary, as M. Portail was also very ill, and was not to be seen. "The great lords alone see him; he has a little hermitage at the end of the enclosure, from which he will not budge, and he comes rarely to the Conference." ‡ Hence solitude was deepening around her soul, prepared by all these bereavements for the great sacrifice.

February 4, 1660, shortly after writing to Poland

* Letter to St. Vincent, Dec. 19, 1659.

† Letter to St. Vincent, sending a picture, "Jesus Crowned with Thorns," Jan. 4, 1660.

‡ Letter to Sister Mathurine Guerin, Jan. 9, 1660.

to a Sister whose courage had been somewhat shaken by the commotions of the war,* she was attacked by a fever which, at the end of eight days, became so violent that all hope of saving her appeared lost. She suffered much without complaining or wishing to be pitied. "It is necessary that pain should be where sin has abounded," she said; "God is just; in exercising justice He is merciful." The Holy Viaticum and Extreme Unction were administered. Michel Le Gras, his wife and daughter, were present. "My dear children," she said to them after receiving the last Sacraments, "I pray God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, by the power given to parents to bless their children, that He give you Himself His benediction, detach you from earthly things, and, attaching you to Himself, make you live as good Christians." Then turning to her Daughters, she blessed them in turn, recommending to them a love for their vocation and the service of the poor.

Every human resource and all supernatural means were resorted to for her relief. A stole of St. Charles Borromeo and a relic of St. Francis de Sales were applied, and, as she felt easier the night following, it was thought that these great saints had obtained a reprieve for her. Alas! it was only a respite God had granted to a family He willed not to overwhelm by a double affliction at the same time.

* The queen, fleeing from the enemy, had taken refuge at Dantzic, and taken the Sisters with her.

M. Portail received the last Sacraments on the same day as Mlle. Le Gras, although not seeming so ill as she was. On the 14th of February, however, he breathed his last, after a life of seventy years, forty-five years of which were passed in the Congregation of the Mission. "He had always feared death," St. Vincent wrote; "but seeing it approach, he beheld it with calmness, and holily and sweetly died as he had lived."

As to Mlle. Le Gras, she lived for nearly three weeks without fever, continuing faithful to the end in her love for the poor, and wishing to be informed of the aid they received in the house or at their homes. She also gave necessary orders that nothing might be wanting to them.

On March 9th the fever returned, with a commencement of gangrene in the arm. On the 12th she asked to receive Communion a second time. When told that the priest of Saint-Laurence promised her that blessing for the next day, she expressed aloud her joy and gratitude. "God be blessed! God be blessed!" And during the night she repeated, "What happiness, my Lord; if I live I shall receive You to-morrow!" She communicated with such effusions of respect and love as deeply moved all the assistants. The priest of Saint-Laurence asked her to give her blessing once more to her Daughters, and she consented. "My dear Sisters," she said to them, resuming in that solemn moment what had been the passion of her life and the supreme wish of her heart, "I continue to ask

the blessing of God for you, and beg Him to give you grace to persevere in your vocation and serve Him in the way He demands of you. Take great care to serve the poor, and above all live well together in great union and cordiality, loving one another, imitate the union of the life of our Saviour, and beg the Holy Virgin to be your only Mother." She added that she was dying in great esteem of their vocation, and if she lived one hundred years she would ask nothing for them but to be faithful to it.

After this last advice to her Daughters, she wished to say farewell to the Father of her soul. She sent him a message to that effect, begging him to write her with his own hand some word of consolation; but the Saint, to secure her one merit more for eternity, would not grant the favor asked, and contented himself with sending her word by one of his priests that, if she were going in advance, he hoped to meet her in heaven. Although nothing could be more painful than this last sacrifice, she accepted it without any apparent regret.

Several ladies came afterwards to visit her, and one of them asked if she did not rejoice on going to possess the glory of heaven. "Ah! it is inexpressible," answered the sick lady, "but I am not worthy of it." The Duchess of Ventadour,* not wishing to leave her, sat by her bed the greater part of the night of March

* Marie de la Guiche, second wife of Charles de Lévis, Duke of Ventadour. When an infant her mother took her to the Carmelites to receive the benediction of Mother Madeleine.

14, sharing the care necessary between Sisters Julianne, Barbara, and Frances of Paula. Towards six o'clock in the morning, Mlle. Le Gras, always detached from herself, urged them to take some rest, promising to let them know when the time would come. Her ardor for prayer redoubled as her strength declined; and as if to give a last proof of her attachment to the Church, she made use of her language, repeating with Job, "Have pity on me, because the hand of the Lord hath touched me," and with David, "Look on me, and have mercy on me, for I am alone and poor." For a moment her mind wandered, and she murmured, "Take me out of here." A priest of the Mission, who was assisting, presented the cross, saying, "Jesus Christ did not ask to come down from the cross;" she answered, "Oh no; He remained on it." She added, "Let me go, because my Saviour comes for me." A moment later a thought of approaching judgment made her fear. "O my God!" she said, "must I appear before my Judge?" The priest answered her by this verse of the Psalm: "To Thee I have lifted up my soul. My God, in Thee have I hope." She finished it herself: "I shall not be confounded."

In the morning, Sisters from the Foundling came to see her. They knelt around her bed, but she bade them rise; and being scarcely able to speak, yet she found strength sufficient to give them her constant advice: "Take great care in serving the poor."

Finally, at eleven o'clock, she had her bed-curtains

drawn aside to warn her Daughters, as she had promised, that her hour was approaching, and she entered on her agony. It lasted half an hour, during which her eyes were constantly raised to heaven. She followed the prayers and recommendation of the soul to the end, the Duchess of Ventadour holding the lighted taper for her. Then she wished once more to bless her Daughters kneeling around her, and, making a great effort, she said: "My dear Sisters, I wish that all our Sisters were here; but you can tell it to the others. I pray our Lord to give you the grace to live true Daughters of Charity, in union and charity one with the other, as God requires of you." Like St. John she had always the same thought, the same advice to give to her children. The priest having proposed to give her the benediction at the moment of death, which Pope Innocent X. had granted to her and her companions, "It is not time yet," she murmured, quite low; a little after she appeared to want something with great earnestness, and they asked if the time were come. Striking her breast three times, she said "Yes," with much earnestness. From that time she spoke no more, and requested the curtains to be closed around her, as if to sleep. Fifteen minutes after she sweetly slept in God. This was Passion-Monday, March 15, 1660, between eleven o'clock and noon. The priest of Saint-Laurence (her parish), to whom she had made her general confession, was present, and exclaimed, "What a beautiful soul,

taking with it the grace of its baptism!" Thus in his enthusiasm anticipating the language of history.

The body remained exposed that day and the next, and received numerous proofs of public veneration. The Wednesday following her funeral took place. To satisfy the desire expressed in her will, the funeral was modest. "If anything were done for her different from the other Sisters, it would signify that in death she was not worthy to be a true Sister of Charity and servant of the members of Jesus Christ." * Although she had requested to be interred near the church of Saint-Lazarus, in a little court that was formerly a cemetery, Saint Vincent granted the petition of the priest of Saint-Laurence, who solicited for his church the honor of receiving a deposit so dear to his parish, and she was placed in the Visitation† chapel, where it had been her custom to pray, and outside of which were ranged the graves of the Sisters. A large cross, with this inscription, "Spes Unica," according to her recommendation, was suspended over the place where she reposes and reproduced outside, thus connecting her tomb with the tombs of her Daughters.

The first author who wrote her life adds here : "It seems that God was not satisfied to make known the merit of His faithful servant through the good He

* Will of Mlle. Le Gras.

† This chapel, the first on the right on entering the church, is now dedicated to our Lady of La Salette.

effected by her ministry during life, but He would also reveal her glory by extraordinary effects operated at her tomb. From time to time there came from it a vapor which exhaled a delicious perfume similar to that of the violet and iris. Numbers of persons bore witness to it; and, more surprising still, the Sisters who came there to pray were so perfumed that they carried the odor with them to the sick Sisters and into the infirmary of the house. I might add the experience which I have had of it several times, if it were of any consideration in this place; and I can truly say that after taking every precaution possible to discover if there were not some natural cause for it, I could find none."*

The personal qualities of this author, and the approbation given his book by five prelates and five doctors of the Sorbonne, confer incontestable value on this testimony. Gobillon was priest of the parish of Saint-Laurence, and the marvellous phenomenon of which he wrote took place in his time. The truth of his words is confirmed by his contemporaries. Nothing, therefore, authorizes us to doubt the truth of a favor not uncommon in the history of the servants of God. "But," continues our author, "whatever be the nature of this odor from the tomb of this servant of the poor, there is one all spiritual from the example of her life, which is a miraculous work of grace and the most glorious

* Gobillon, *op. cit.*, pp. 185, 186.

mark of her sanctity." This odor has not ceased to spread and to perfume the Church, and more than one soul has wished, without judging in anticipation the decision of supreme authority, that the precious ashes of her whose story it falls on us to relate may never leave the tomb of their repose except for a place on our altars.

In the eighteenth century, after the beatification of Mme. de Chantal, the Sisters of Charity received letters expressing the desire that "the same honor might be granted to Mme. Louise de Marillac."* The Abbé of Saint-Fonds wrote to them: "To judge of her works by the great good which followed them, she merits to be declared blessed;" and he added: "All Paris, where your Mother was born, will be with you; and as it acknowledged a little shepherdess for its patron and treasure, it would have a second in Louise de Marillac." This thought seemed so truthful, that when the Sisters of Charity came into the possession of the remains of their foundress, the Superioress† and officers, acting in the name of and for the rest of the community, had to bind themselves by a solemn act, in presence of the priest of Saint-Laurence, "to let her feasts be celebrated in that parish and make to it a present of part of the relics, in case that God, manifesting the sanctity of His faithful servant, would permit her to be honored in the Church."

* Arch. of the Mission.

† Sister Marie-Anne Bonnejoye. The paper, dated 1755, is preserved in the Archives of the Mission.

More than one hundred years have rolled away since this engagement, and two hundred since the death of Mlle. Le Gras, and the seed she sowed has not ceased to increase.

At the hour in which we write, twenty thousand of her Daughters, spread over the two hemispheres, are everywhere giving new life to her charity. Collecting and sheltering children, serving the sick, consoling the poor, carrying aid to the wounded and the prisoner—in fine, accomplishing towards the little ones those acts of mercy which the Saviour has held up to us as characteristic of the “kingdom of heaven” in this world; renewing their work every day without fail and without noise—is not this, for them, the mark of their origin, the features of their race, the heritage and fruit of their Mother’s lessons? And is it not still more for *her* the ever-subsisting proof of a sanctity that we have, alas! ill succeeded in bringing out of obscurity, but which we pray God one day to make manifest?

CHAPTER XVII,

Conference on the Virtues of Mlle. Le Gras—Translation of her Remains—What became of them during the Revolution and afterwards.



THE day after the death of Mlle. Le Gras, St. Vincent wrote to all the houses of the Daughters of Charity announcing the loss they had sustained, and recommending to their prayers the holy soul which "he had great reason to believe in possession of glory;" being sick, four months elapsed before he was able, as he wished, to assemble his dear Daughters to speak to them of their Mother.

At length, July 24th, he assembled them at Saint-Lazarus, where, Sister Jeanne Loret tells us, they found means of seeing him without giving him the trouble of coming down to the parlor. "Our honored Father is well, thank God, in mind and heart, but . . . he can no longer rise without assistance. Let us prepare ourselves for the will of God, for he can scarcely survive this winter."* Everything contributed to make this reunion a solemn time: the intention which brought them together, and the age of him who seemed also taking leave of his Daughters while presiding over the last testimony of veneration given to "this great servant of God."

* Letter addressed to Mathurine Guerin.

A faithful hand has preserved for us the details of this meeting. It is a portrait of Mlle. Le Gras taken, almost the day after her death, by those who knew her best, her father according to grace, and her daughters by adoption. Hence we believe we ought to give the Conference entire, although at the risk of repeating the portions of it already quoted in the course of this work. We shall evoke the gratitude of the reader by offering him, in all its freshness and life a document still new to him :

“Monsieur our honored Father,” writes the Sister, whose name we know not, but to whose faithful hand we are indebted for these details, “having reached the place of conference and invoked the assistance of the Holy Spirit, as was his custom, spoke to us as follows: ‘My dear Sisters, I give God thanks for having preserved me to this hour, that I may see you all once more assembled together. You may well imagine how much I wished to be able to do so before the extreme illness of Mlle. Le Gras; but I also had a sickness which greatly enfeebled me. That was the good pleasure of God, and I believe He permitted it only for the greater perfection of the person of whom we are going to speak.

“‘As the Lord has also disposed of M. Portail, who always had great zeal for the sanctification of your company, if we say something of him *en passant*, it will not be out of place.

“‘But it is principally of Mlle. Le Gras that we

now treat: of her virtues—those above all which you propose most especially to imitate; for you should follow her example if you wish to be good Daughters of Charity. This Conference will have three points, as usual. The first, the reasons why the Daughters of Charity should entertain themselves with the virtues of such of their Sisters as have gone to God; and particularly with those of their very dear Mother, Mlle. Le Gras. Second point, what are the virtues remarked in her. Third, which of her virtues strike us most, and which do we propose most to imitate, by the grace of God.’”

The first Sister whom the Saint called on could not speak;* sorrow and tears were choking her voice. She could not recall the thought of her good Mother without, at the same time, recalling to mind that she had lost her. She conquered herself in a little while, as we shall see farther on. He had to ask another, and she replied: “The first reason which occurs to me, Father, why we should go over the virtues of our most honored Mother is to give thanks to God for them; the second is to persuade us to imitate them; and if we do not, it will be a great subject of confusion for us before God, because He gave her to us as a model which we ought to follow. As to the virtues which I have remarked in her, the first is that she always had her mind on God, above all in her pains and sickness, in all of which she considered only the

* This was Sister Julianne Loret.

good pleasure of God. She was never heard to complain of her infirmities; on the contrary, she always appeared content and gay. Secondly, she had a great love for the poor, and took great pleasure in serving them. I have seen her receiving the poor creatures just out of prison; she washed their feet, bound up their wounds, and dressed them in the garments of her son. Thirdly, she had great charity for infirm Sisters; she went often to visit the infirmary; she was happy to do them some little service; she took great care to assist them in death; and if it were at night, she arose, unless when she was very sick. When her sickness was such that she could not go herself, she sent her assistant to do her part, to remember her to them, and give them some words of consolation. She endeavored also to visit those in danger of death in the parishes of Paris. Her tenderness for the Sisters was so great that she had to be cautiously informed when God saw fit to dispose of them; and then her tears flowed in abundance. With a heart like hers, we are not surprised that she entertained for her son and the other members of her family all the affection prescribed by nature and religion. Fourthly, she carried humility as far as it could go. She was the first on her knees to ask pardon of all her Sisters. I have seen her stretched on the ground, where she wished to be trodden under foot. She washed the dishes, and would have done all the hard work of the house if her strength would have permitted her. She served

at table and in the refectory, asked pardon for her faults, and performed penance, such as holding her arms extended or lying on the floor."

M. Vincent having asked another what she remarked, she said: "Father, Mademoiselle had great prudence in everything. It seemed that she knew all our faults, for she mentioned them before we had time to speak of them to her; but she used great prudence in her admonitions. She recommended us always not to seek our own interests in our actions, but only the glory of God. She was also truly interior."

"My Sisters," St. Vincent continued, "a very essential virtue has just been remarked in your worthy Mother. Truly I never knew a person possessed of more prudence than she. She possessed it to the highest point, and I wish with all my heart that the company had this virtue so necessary to it. It consists in seeing in what manner we should comport ourselves on all occasions, and above all in examining well the means, the time, and the place of making the remarks we are sometimes obliged to make. May it please God, my Sisters, to give you this virtue according to His knowledge of your necessity for it, since ordinary prudence will not suffice for you. You have to treat with persons of rank and with the poor; and you ought to know how to comport yourselves exactly in these different circumstances. And what will teach you? Prudence. There is a false prudence which makes one disregard the time and place, and hence makes one act inconsiderately. It is very

difficult not to fall into this fault. Alas! my God, there is no religious house where it is not found. Nevertheless it is very dangerous; and you know that there have been some among you who by it have lost their vocation. If there is imprudence in your company, there will be as much evil said of it on one side as there is good on the other. At Narbonne the most beautiful eulogiums are said of our Sisters, because their modesty and circumspection are admirable. Elsewhere they say: 'There are Sisters without prudence, who do not mind what they do.' Prudence, then, my Sisters, prudence everywhere; with prudence you will everywhere have tranquillity; without it you will everywhere have trouble and disorder. But, to have it, you must ask it of God. And who will help you to obtain it? Your good Mother, who is in heaven; she has not less charity for you in that happy abode than she had on earth; she has still more, and in a manner more perfect. Address yourselves then to her; for although we cannot honor in public worship the dead who are not canonized, yet we can pray to them in private."

After these reflections, M. Vincent asked another Sister what she had remarked in the virtuous departed.

"Father," she replied, "I remarked that she desired very much for the company to preserve its spirit of humility and poverty. She often said, 'We are the servants of the poor, consequently we ought to be more poor than they.'"

"You are right," said our most honored Father, "to say that your good Mother esteemed poverty much; to be convinced of it we need only see how she was clothed; but although clothed very poorly, she thought it too much, and asked permission to live henceforth like the poor. And whatever belongs to the company, she always wished it kept in that spirit. In fact, this is the sovereign means to preserve it. Poverty is a virtue which our Saviour practised on earth and which He wished His apostles to practice. The Master and disciples were poor in their clothing. The same voice which said, 'Wo, to ye rich,' also said, 'The foxes have holes, and the birds their nests: but the Son of Man hath not where to lay his head.' It was with much wisdom, then, that your pious Mother made you practise exact poverty in everything for twenty-five years: in your clothing, your nourishment, and all your needs. What a misfortune should any one of you relax on this point, and, instead of being satisfied with the frugality of the refectory, should seek the ladies' table! Ah! if unhappily some one should say, 'We are not well nourished;' 'Such a way to live,' etc., my Sisters, you should cry out, 'Wolf! wolf!' You must send away such as the spirit of the demon, which must be chased away at the commencement. My Sisters, preserve poverty, and poverty will preserve you. Content yourselves to be clothed in rags, but not to depart from your simplicity. Imprint, O Lord, these maxims on our hearts; engrave them so deeply

there that, seeing a Daughter of Charity, one may see resplendent in her the spirit of poverty and exclaim, 'Blessed be God who has given her that spirit!'"

After these reflections the Sister resumed her remarks, saying, "I remarked that Mlle. Le Gras showed as much affection for one Sister as for another, and tried to satisfy every one."

"That is true," replied M. Vincent; "and although the effusion of her heart did not always appear the same, I know she had love for all."

"Father," added the Sister, "Mademoiselle had great zeal for the salvation of souls. She was very interior, and her mind much occupied with God."

M. Vincent attached much importance to this last article. After proving that to be interior was to have the mind and heart elevated to God, and to be disengaged from all affection to the world, from parents or country, in a word, from all earthly things, he exhorted the Sisters to say often, "Destroy in me, O Lord, all that is displeasing to Thee, and grant that I may be no more so full of myself; grant that in each of my actions I may have no other desire than that of pleasing Thee."

Again he returned to Mlle. Le Gras; and after remarking that the greatest saints were not without their shading of imperfection, he said that the little hastiness sometimes perceptible in her was nothing, and, although she humbled herself for it a moment after, there would be hard work to find any sin. To say that hers was like the anger of Jesus Christ when He

drove the venders from the Temple would be saying what is right. "Be ye angry and sin not," said the royal prophet. He added that "for the thirty-eight years of their acquaintance he had known in that lady only a soul always pure; pure in her youth, pure in her married life, in her widowhood. In her confessions she wept over her slightest faults with such bitterness that he could scarcely appease her."

From all these remarks our most honored Father concluded that each one of those to whom he spoke ought to use all her efforts to become interior—that is to say, to occupy herself with God alone, and see but Him in all her actions. "Thus, my dear Sisters, when you are tempted to yield to anything against your rule, you must say to yourselves, 'I am a Daughter of Charity, and consequently Daughter of Mlle. Le Gras, who, notwithstanding the inclinations of nature, knew so well how to conquer herself and occupy herself with God alone. Ah! I will follow her example and overcome myself.'"

But since tepidity makes excuses and intrenches itself in the idea that it is not given to all to imitate privileged souls, whom God conducts by ways of predilection, M. Vincent, who profited by everything to conduct to virtue, demonstrated that the Daughters of Charity could and ought to walk in the footsteps of their Mother in Jesus Christ.

A letter which he had just received from Poland furnished a proof of this important truth. One of his priests in Varsovia had written him that the

queen had made a long journey, leaving at her departure the poor Daughters of Charity to keep order everywhere; that they had acquitted themselves so well of this task, and with such prudence and general satisfaction, that the queen on her return was charmed with accounts from all quarters, and went to spend an entire day with them in their house, and gave them every testimony of singular affection.

"See, my Sisters, what odor your company is placed in by a life truly interior, truly devoted to God. Take this lustre from it and you take all. What evil is done by a Sister who walks a contrary path! She gives talk to the whole city! What do I say?—to the whole province! The priests, the princes even, are told of her bad conduct. Yes, my daughters, the evil done by one is enough to destroy the whole company. Let us then redouble our zeal, and ask of God incessantly that the whole community and each of its members may be sanctified and their number increased."

M. Vincent made two others speak. The first said simply that she had nothing to say, if not that the holy deceased was a mirror on which the company had only to keep their eyes and be perfect. "I have always recognized in Mademoiselle so much support and charity for us that it consumed her." "Father," said the second, "she had so much charity for me that when she perceived in me the least trouble of mind, she spoke to me with great sweetness."

The Sister who had been spoken to first and could not respond for weeping now rose and said: "Father,

if you think it well for me to speak, I will try to do so." "You will do me a great pleasure, my daughter," answered our most honored Father, who was so overcome that he could not restrain his tears.

After saying in few words that it was just for the Daughters to entertain themselves on the virtues of their dear Mother, as much for the glory of God as to animate themselves to follow her example, which they were obliged to, since God had made use of her to teach them how to conduct themselves in order to be pleasing in His sight, she continued thus: "In regard to the virtues practised by this worthy Mother, it would need a book to write them and minds much more elevated than ours to relate them. Nevertheless, as obedience requires it of me, I must do it; but when I shall have said all that memory can furnish there will still remain much left unsaid. Her admirable humility showed itself on so many occasions that they cannot be recounted. That it was which made her so respectful to all her Sisters, so that she was the first to salute them, to speak to them always in a tone of supplication, to thank them so affectionately for any service rendered her, and for the labor or trouble attending certain employments, so that I was oftentimes quite ashamed. I have seen her humble herself so far as to beg me to warn her when she did wrong. My embarrassment was great because I could find no occasion to do what I was commanded, although I watched for it in order to do what was required of me under obedience."

"You are right, my Sister," said M. Vincent. "That is what I told you already. It was difficult to remark a fault in her. Not that she had none. The just fall several times a day; but these faults were so slight that they were imperceptible." "Continue, my daughter."

"When it happened sometimes, Father, that some Sisters would not take their admonition in good part and would be angry in my presence, she would ask me if she were not the cause, and if she had not spoken harshly or otherwise than was right; and when I had assured her that she had not, she always excused those who had showed discontent, as also those whose faults had been reported. 'We must suffer,' she said. 'God has chosen us for that. We must give example to others and be very courageous to support our Sisters.' She has sometimes sent for me on purpose to ask pardon when she thought she had given me pain, although it was I who was in the wrong; and she often prevented me when I would try to be the first to excuse myself.

She always accused herself with great humility in the Conferences on Fridays. She imputed to herself all the faults committed in the community, as if God had permitted them as a punishment for her cowardice in His service. She had great charity for the poor, whom she served with great pleasure, and for the Sisters, whom she supported and excused as much as possible. It is true she reprovved with an air of severity when it was necessary; but it was

always on the principle of charity. She had a mother's compassion for those who suffered in body or mind. She kept for several years Sisters who might have been sent away for their imperfections. She always waited to see if they would correct themselves: and how many, perhaps, have been saved by that? She had so great a love for holy poverty that she never would consent to wear anything new, although she gave to others very willingly whatever was necessary. She would never consent to have a cloak made from a piece of serge given her for that purpose. Hers was all worn and pieced in different colors; but she would never consent to leave it aside. If something new was left for her to wear, she had it taken away the moment she perceived that it was new. She never wore a head-dress but those which she believed were bought at the second-hand store.

One of her most ardent wishes was that the company after her death would preserve the same spirit of poverty and frugality which she judged necessary for its existence. It was a torture for her to see that in her infirmities it was necessary to nourish her differently from the rest of her Sisters. She humbled herself and asked pardon for her necessities as if they were faults. She had the most admirable confidence in Divine Providence, and unceasingly exhorted her Daughters to trust in that beneficent Hand which never failed those who leaned on it for support. Her submission to the will of God was equal to her confidence. This submission, which is more apparent in

infirmities, shone with lustre in all her sickness, but especially in that which took her from us. She suffered the most violent grief in being deprived of the presence of those dearest to her on earth; and although she could not but feel keenly all these trials, she never testified the slightest annoyance. She had the greatest meekness, and she received so sweetly all the Sisters who went to her that they were always edified. To judge of the wisdom of her guidance, we have only to cast our eyes upon the good state in which she left the company in both spiritual and temporal matters. But to wish to mention all her virtues would be to wish never to finish."

As our honored Father had intimated in the beginning of the Conference that we might say a word of M. Portail, a good Sister who was full of veneration for him spoke as follows: She had remarked in him a very great charity for his neighbor; so much that in midwinter he went in the mud into the chapel to hear a poor Sister's confession, saying that our Lord had done much more for even a Samaritan woman. She also praised his charity and zeal for the salvation of souls; zeal that went so far that he could not restrain his tears when a poor Sister lost her vocation.

Finally, M. Vincent closed the Conference with these familiar words, which show so well his humility: "I beg our Lord, although I am an unworthy and miserable sinner, to give you His blessing, by the merit of that which He gave to His Apostles

when He departed from them, and I pray that He detach you from all earthly things and attach you to those of heaven. May the blessing of God the Father Almighty, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost descend upon you and remain forever. Amen."

What Solomon had predicted for the strong woman had been accomplished in Louise. Her children had arisen and had called her blessed. But after this homage rendered to "the great servant whom God had called to Himself," it still remained, before they finished, to imbibe her spirit in order to choose the one who was to have the painful honor of succeeding her. God permitted St. Vincent to accomplish this task. Contrary to the sad forebodings of several, he was able, on August 27, 1660, to assemble once more the Daughters of Charity around him. This was the last! With his usual openness of heart he told them that one day Mlle. Le Gras being sick, he had asked her which one of her Sisters she judged capable and the most proper to replace her. After some moments of hesitation and reflection, she said: "Sir, as you have chosen me with the permission of Divine Providence, it seems to me that the first time she ought not to be named by the plurality of votes, but that you yourself ought to appoint her. For my part, I think that Marguerite Chétif would be very right. She is a Daughter who has succeeded everywhere, and everywhere been good. At Arras, where she is, she has done well, and has been very courageous among the soldiers." "And as Mlle. Le Gras stopped at this point, I also," added the Saint,

"stop at her advice." This said, obedient to the last wish of the foundress, he named Marguerite Chétif Superioress of the Daughters of Charity.

It was his last will. Three weeks after, the little company, made doubly orphans, celebrated the funeral obsequies of St. Vincent, September 20, 1660. During the ceremony Sister Marguerite was remarkable for her grief. "She excited the pity of every one," we read in a letter of the time. On coming from the church her Sisters, commencing with the oldest, went and embraced her, renewing aloud their promise of obedience.

"Be consoled, Mother," they said to her, with all cordiality possible, "be consoled; you will not have as much trouble as you think; we promise to be more docile and more affectionate than ever."*

The lessons of Mlle. Le Gras had borne their fruit; but if her spirit was with them, her mortal remains reposed too far from them and in too lowly a resting-place. To give them more honorable sepulture, to have possession of her remains, was the most ardent desire of the Daughters of Charity, and they soon set about the work.

In concert with M. Le Gras her son, and by the intervention of Mme. de Miramion, they first obtained from the Archbishop of Paris permission to open her tomb and replace her wooden coffin by one of lead. Consequently, April 10, 1680,† at 9 o'clock

* Letter of Marguerite Chétif, Nov. 8, 1660.

† It was Passion-Wednesday, twenty years, to the very day, after the funeral of Mlle. Le Gras.

in the evening, they proceeded to the opening of the tomb, in presence of M. Jolly, Superior-General of the Mission, Mathurine Guerin, then Superioress of the Daughters of Charity, and three officers of the community, Madame de Miramion, and a Sister of the community, and last, Mlle. Le Gras, grand-daughter of the deceased, and M. Gobillon, parish priest of Saint-Laurence. The bones were found intact and of a reddish color. Mme. de Miramion rolled them in linen she had prepared for this purpose, and placed them herself in a new leaden coffin bearing an inscription on copper. After all present had said a short prayer, the remains were sprinkled with holy water and lowered again into the tomb, where they rested nearly one hundred years. At length, October 22, 1755, the Archbishop of Paris, yielding to the renewed entreaties of the Daughters of Charity, permitted them to transport her precious remains into their chapel in the Faubourg Saint-Denis.* There they remained until the Revolution. In 1797 the mother-house was confiscated and sold; the chapel was demolished, and also part of the buildings, to open two streets which, by a kind of derision, received the names of Charity and Fidelity, and the Sisters had to purchase the bones of their Mother for sixty livres,† in order to

* This translation was made November 22 of the same year.

† The receipt of the sixty livres, still extant, is couched in these terms: "I acknowledge to have received from citizen Mlle. Françoise the sum of 60 livres for a case of lead enclosed in a box, such as has been found in the destruction of the chapel of the forenamed Sisters

claim them as their property. They concealed them in a house inhabited by two of the Sisters in the Faubourg Saint-Martin (No. 91); afterward, not believing them sufficiently secure, they placed them in a little case two feet long by fourteen inches wide, the easier to hide, which they carried to No. 455 Rue Maçons-Sorbonne, where the Mother Superior and several of her companions had found refuge.

A new era for the Daughters of St. Vincent was soon to open. On the 1st *Nivose*, year 9 (December 21, 1800), the Minister of the Interior, Chaptal, decreed "that help to the sick could not be assiduously administered except by persons vowed to the state of service in the hospitals," and he directed by *the enthusiasm of charity* that the citizen Deleau, so-called Superioress of the Sisters of Charity, should form pupils for the service of the hospitals.* He granted for that purpose a house formerly occupied by the orphans, No. 746 Rue Vieu-Colombier.† The community, which had been dispersed during the tumult, reassembled here by degrees.‡ By the ad-

of Charity. Given at Paris, this 3d vendémiaire, year 6 of the republic."

"LEBRUN-LEJEUNE."

* *Moniteur universel* of the 9th *Nivose*, year 9.

† This house is now the barracks of Pompiers.

‡ The Daughters of Charity, obliged by the Revolution to abandon their costume, wore a black dress and bonnet. The fourth Sunday of Advent, 1804, Pope Pius VII. came to visit them. He appeared astonished that they had not resumed their habit, and was told that no religious community had dared to do so. He spoke of it to the emperor, saying that the good Sisters of Charity looked like widows. The emperor, at this request, authorized the Sisters to resume their costume. This was in the spring of 1805.

vice of the director, M. Placiard, the remains of Mlle. Le Gras were brought here. Two of the Sisters received from the hands of the porters their precious burden, and bore it to the chapel, where they rested some seconds on the steps of the choir; they then crossed the infirmary to a hall on the second story set apart for retreats, where the sacred remains were deposited until further advice.

Even here the wanderer's course was not to be at an end. June 28, 1815, the entrance of the allied forces into the town of Saint-Denis obliged the pupils of the Legion of Honor to take refuge in Paris, and the house of Vieux Colombière was assigned as their dwelling. The Sisters of Charity received an imperial decree to abandon the Hôtel de Chatillon, formerly inhabited by Mme. de la Vallière,* and they had to hasten their departure. It so happened that the foundress herself preceded them to their new residence. One of the Mothers of the Seminary, Sister Gaubert, seized with fear at the approach of the troops, without waiting the hour fixed for departure, called a carriage, placed in it the box containing the venerated remains, and, taking her crucifix in her hand, commended herself to the guidance of God. She was conducted to the Rue du Bac, where all the Sisters arrived soon after. Finally, several years later,† all fears being dispersed, the remains of Mlle. Le Gras, which had been hidden

* The beginning of this change of residence, necessitated by the insufficiency of Rue Vieux Colombière, was due to M. de Champagny, then Minister of the Interior.

† November 5, 1825.

in a secluded corner of the house to this time, were solemnly brought to that chapel so dear to the Sisters by an apparition of the Immaculate Virgin. They repose now near the steps of the sanctuary. The place is marked by a slab of black marble, on which is engraved the epitaph of the Church of Saint-Laurence, to which are added the dates of subsequent translations. We shall be thanked for reproducing the text, which we took with respectful emotion from the stone itself.

HERE LIES
MADAME LOUISE DE MARILLAC,
WIDOW OF M. LE GRAS,
SECRETARY OF COMMANDS
TO QUEEN MARIE DE' MEDICIS,
FOUNDRESS AND FIRST SUPERIORESS
OF THE DAUGHTERS OF CHARITY,
SERVANT OF THE SICK POOR.

INTERRED IN THE CHAPEL OF THE VISITATION
IN THE PAROCHIAL CHURCH OF SAINT-LAURENT,
MARCH 17, 1660.

TRANSLATED OCTOBER 24, 1755,
INTO THE CHAPEL
OF THE OLD HOUSE OF THE DAUGHTERS OF CHARITY,
FAUBOURG SAINT-DENIS;
FROM THERE SHE WAS WITHDRAWN
SEPTEMBER 25, 1799;
AND, AFTER SEVERAL OTHER TRANSLATIONS,
WAS AT LAST DEPOSITED IN THIS CHAPEL
FOR THE CONSOLATION OF THE COMPANY,
NOVEMBER 5, 1824.

TRUE MOTHER OF THE POOR,
MODEL OF ALL VIRTUES,
WORTHY OF ETERNAL REPOSE,
MAY HER VENERATED DUST,
RECALLING HER CHARITY,
INFUSE HER SPIRIT.

We shall add but one word more in closing ; but that word, borrowed from the archives of the company, will be more eloquent than all that could be written of Louise de Marillac :

“The work she founded counted in 1881, in France alone, nine hundred and twenty-three establishments ; eight hundred and nine in the rest of Europe ; two hundred and thirty in Asia and America : that is to say, nearly two thousand houses where the poor are served and God is glorified.”

**This book is under no circumstances to be
taken from the Building**

Keywords: *depression, mood, mood disorder, mood disorder with anxiety, mood disorder without anxiety, mood disorder with anxiety, mood disorder without anxiety, mood disorder with anxiety, mood disorder without anxiety*

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